

THE ARENA

The City, that compact, discreet and respectable world of banks and bankers, big business and Government finance, is the Arena of William Haggard's latest study in sophisticated suspense—an arena where the contestants are the two merchant banking houses, Bonavias, and Baker and Looe, the one traditional and old-established, the other the pushing, impersonal newcomer.

The weapons they use openly are all too well known in our day: the merger, the takeover bid, the share buying. But cloaked beneath the civil courtesies of the arena are the savage realities of the greed and hatred which men will use for their own purposes—for the arena is but one step above the jungle, where there can be only one victor and no survivor.

Walter Hillyard fights desperately to save Bonavias from the devouring embrace of 'the Bakerloo', whose champion, Sabin Scott, seeks not only power and aggrandisement, but bitterly nursed personal revenge and humiliation upon his rival. It is a match in which no holds are barred, no blows unworthy. Watching them, waiting, alert and evil, ready at a sign of weakness to pounce upon either, is Steiffer, to whom both they and their Houses are but small pieces in a play for greater power, greater revenge—so great that the projected merger becomes a matter of vital importance to Colonel Russell of the Security Executive, and it becomes his responsibility to see that Walter Hillyard lives . . . if only for a little while longer.

Also by William Haggard:

SLOW BURNER
THE TELEMANN TOUCH
VENETIAN BLIND
CLOSED CIRCUIT

The Arena

WILLIAM HAGGARD



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I

COLONEL CHARLES RUSSELL walked composedly up Whitehall to the Security Executive. For a man not particularly tall his stride was in inch or two longer than an infantryman of the line would have found comfortable. It was a gait which could tell the informed observer much: it could tell him that Charles Russell, before the General Staff had swallowed him, had served in a regiment which had been difficult to get into and—surprising only to the demagogue—rather stauncher in battle than the next. Mostly his contemporaries had been killed. The survivors met at annual dinners, and Charles Russell walked along Whitehall, his stride deliberate and faintly ceremonial. A policeman saluted, and Russell took his hat off. He didn't put a hand to it; he took it off and put it on again. That was something his regiment had been fussy about.

By the standards of conformity at any price his office was a scandal. Coloured prints by Morland hung on the walls, and part of a set of Roberts' Spanish Scenes uncompromising in Victorian gilt frames. Caryatids supported a yellowing mantel; a coal fire spluttered in the grate even in late May, for Russell had seen service in India. There was a generous display of brass, and a silver cup stood on a bracket below a fading photograph—four boys, their figures foreshortened by the wall of the rackets court rising behind them. A tiger skin and Persian rugs better than most. A hatstand made of wood bent in a complicated pattern. The desk was large, a platform supported by formidable pedestals. It was orderly but not noticeably free of papers. Russell rang the bell on it.

The man who came in was younger than himself. His clothes were sober, his flannel suit so dark as to be almost black. His linen was white and his shoes superbly polished. To the extent that both men bore about them still the stamp

of arms they were alike, but there the resemblance ended. Mortimer was fair where Russell was dark. He was heavily built and wore a blond moustache. His manner was deliberate. As he entered his heels had touched together. It had been discreetly done—almost imperceptibly; nevertheless it had been a salute.

'Good morning, Mortimer,' Russell said. 'Sit down, won't you?'

Russell's assistant slipped into the armchair beside the desk, and for a moment Russell was silent; then he said crisply: 'What do you know about the merchant banks?'

'Practically nothing, sir.'

'That makes a pair of us. It's a very strange business, though—I mean it's very strange in the middle of the twentieth century. I remember we thought we were onto the fringe of it in that Slow Burner affair, but in the event no merchant bank had anything to do with it. Just four young men who worked in one. Pretty typical they were.'

'Wet,' Major Mortimer said. 'Wringing wet. But very well connected.'

'Of course they were well connected. They wouldn't have been in Blüchers if they hadn't been. That's one thing I know about merchant banking—it's family business. But they seem to make it work; they seem very good at training their men. They take in these rich young nobodies, and by the time they're forty they're shrewd and competent bankers. Sometimes it doesn't work, of course, but they can always go outside if they're obliged to. I know of one which pinched a flier from the Bank of England. Naturally he jumped at it, for it'd be four or five times his previous money.'

'I know what you mean.'

'Then you know more about merchant banking than you claim.'

'You forget you asked me to do a little work on Bonavias.'

'So I did. And . . . ?'

'And it's a fascinating story.' Robert Mortimer relaxed, for he had begun to enjoy himself. 'Four generations ago a Neapolitan thug called Bonavia smuggles himself into this

country. He was a scoundrel—money-lending, strong-arm extortion, the lot—but he made an undeniable fortune. It's a fact about large scale blackmail that you can't operate it successfully without its obverse. I mean protection. And Bonavia had that—plenty and where it mattered. He made about a quarter of a million, a vast sum for those days, and he had two sons. One is dead, but the younger is alive still. He's eighty-ish and he's retired to Naples. Old Enzio Bonavia. He takes no part in the business but he's still very much all there. They all look up to him, even consult him in a crisis. It was he and the other brother who got the banking business on really respectable feet. By then they needed an English connection—I expect they thought of it as front—and they found it. They found a family called Hillyard. They were landed, impeccably upper crust, and they hadn't lost all their money. I don't suppose what they put into the business was particularly important to the Bonavia brothers: it was the name they were after, the connection. With the Hillyards the Bonavias were in.'

Mortimer stopped for breath, and Russell had to prompt him. 'The other brother?' he asked.

'He's long since dead, but his son is very much alive. He's Lord Laver now, a gert great Viscount, and he's chairman of Bonavias. There won't be a second Lord Laver, or there won't unless Lady Laver curls up and he marries an air hostess. That seems to be current form. But there's a daughter. She married the present Hillyard—Walter Hillyard. He's one of the directors.'

'Very pretty,' Russell said reflectively.

'Very pretty indeed. Tidy. Very cosy.'

'Where did you pick all this up?'

Mortimer waved a deprecatory hand. 'In pubs. In clubs. In places where they sing.'

'It's a very good picture. Thank you.'

'It's a tolerable picture—history in a sense—but it isn't hard information. For that I went to Bush House.'

'Where you found . . . ?'

'Where I found that Bonavias isn't a partnership as some

of them still are. It's a private company. And it's family business all right. I've got the shareholding.' Mortimer passed a sheet of paper across the desk and Russell read it:

Enzio Bonavia	40%
Lord Laver	25%
Mrs Cynthia Hillyard (Under marriage settlement made by her father)	10%
Walter Hillyard, Esquire	15%
The Hillyard Trust (Two generations of Hillyard relicts)	5%
Sir Thomas Gutteridge	5%
	—
	100%

As Russell finished reading Mortimer added: 'As I told you, Enzio Bonavia is retired. Lord Laver and Walter Hillyard are directors, and so is Sir Thomas Gutteridge. I don't doubt that he's fairly paid, but he doesn't own the *stuff*. He holds just five per cent—I imagine the minimum he needs to qualify. The rest—what matters—the two families still keep.'

'Yes,' Russell said. 'Ye . . . es.' He had been doing some mental arithmetic, but for the moment didn't share it with Mortimer. It was all too hypothetical. He always shared information—subordinates adored him; but not always his thoughts. But he asked: 'This Hillyard Trust. I suppose Walter Hillyard's a trustee?'

'He and the family solicitor. Who probably does as he's told.'

'Most solicitors know what's good for them. . . . And how do Bonavias *do*?'

'I couldn't find much that helped. They're a private company—what's called an exempt private company.'

'What animal is that?'

'I mugged it up in a law book and—'

'And I trust you will spare me.'

'All right, I'll try to paraphrase. It won't be quite right, but in certain circumstances a private company needn't in-

clude a balance sheet with its annual return to the Registrar.'

'What circumstances?'

'Very roughly, if it really *is* private—a fine old family stick-up like Bonavias.'

'Hm. . . . So that though you could pick up quite a bit of gossip about what sort of year Bonavias have had, the fact remains that unless they put you on the board or sold you a share so that you could go to the A.G.M.—both unlikely—there's no known way of getting at their accounts, far less their assets?'

'That seems to be what a private company is designed for.'

'A pity,' Russell said. 'A pity.' He stared at his silver cup. 'You remember Radarmic?' he asked unexpectedly.

Mortimer stiffened slightly. 'You gave me instructions about Radarmic, sir.'

'Somebody gave *me* instructions. You may guess who.'

'We've been doing the usual things, sir. Routine. We've found nothing suspicious.'

'I didn't think there was, or not in the usual way. This is something of a new one.' Russell sought Mortimer's eye and held it. 'Radarmic and Bonavias are tied. At least I think so.'

'Tied, sir?'

'Very closely connected. I've a story but not quite certainty. I put you on to Bonavias in the hope you would get that certainty. As it is. . . .' Russell shrugged. 'As it is I'm obliged to assume it. Professionally we must.'

'You're suggesting that Bonavias control Radarmic?'

'In a way.'

But Mortimer had been thinking. 'I can't discover what Bonavias own, but we ought to be able to find out who holds the shares of Radarmic. If they're a company, even a private one, they'll be obliged to report their shareholders. Even Bonavias have to do that: I couldn't have found *their* composition otherwise. If Bonavias hold fifty-one per cent of Radarmic and Radarmic's a company—'

Russell said gently: 'They're not a company. They're owned by an oddly assorted pair called J. Barrington

Smythe and James Anstey. What sort of juridical person they actually are I don't really know, and it doesn't matter to us so long as they're not a company. This Barrington Smythe is an ambitious and pompous ass, but he's a very good business man. James Anstey is a boffin.'

'Quite a boffin.'

'A very high-powered boffin indeed. In his line. It happens to be a pretty desperate one. To us.'

'You told me,' Mortimer said quietly.

'I remember. And the story I get, and I don't listen to chatterboxes, is that Radarmic owes Bonavias just two hundred thousand pounds.'

'Quite a piece.'

'It is. But it isn't a stupid story; it's just the sort of thing a merchant bank might go for. Here's this J. Barrington Smythe building up a first-class radar firm from nothing. Naturally he wants money, and I don't suppose a joint stock bank would look at him, or not till he didn't need it anyway. So he gets in touch with Bonavias. From their point of view it may well have looked damned good. I gather they don't get the business they used to, but they're accustomed to assessing men still—they're much better at it than ordinary banks—and when they'd discounted all that blah of Smythe's they probably saw a very shrewd man. So they invest in him—that's what it comes to. Smythe, for his part, looks to the pay off. There's only one way to that in an affair like Radarmic: you float it off as a company and the public buys the shares. It can be reasonably honest: Bonavias would probably handle it themselves. J. Barrington Smythe gets his capital profit and good luck to him. Bonavias get their money back, plus interest, and I don't doubt something else, for I gather there's also an option providing that they can buy shares, when they're issued, at a price pre-determined. To be legal the seller would have to be Smythe or Anstey personally—out of what they take as their share of the issue. Naturally that price will be below the market value, and there'll quite likely be enough passing over to give Bonavias effective control of the new company.'

Mortimer said softly: 'A jungle.' Indignation wasn't an emotion he often indulged, but now he sounded indignant.

Russell shrugged again. 'It's business. Not *our* business, except for one thing.'

'Yes?'

Russell leant forward deliberately. 'Knowing Radarmic,' he said, 'knowing what it does, what it's just started on, it'd be awkward if Bonavias weren't British.'

Major Mortimer looked up quickly. 'They seem British enough. The Hillyards have never been anything else, and the Bonavias by now. . . . The Viscount Laver. . . .'

'I wasn't thinking about Italy.'

'No? Then may I ask . . . ?'

'Have you heard of another merchant bank called Baker and Looe?'

'Who hasn't.'

'Any gossip?'

'I'm full of it. There's gossip that Baker and Looe would like to swallow Bonavias—means to.'

'And who do the gossips say stands behind Baker and Looe?'

Mortimer told him, and for a long moment Russell sat silent. At last he said blandly: 'You've quite a good accent.'

'And do you think Bonavias realize just how important Radarmic has become?'

'Not if Smythe and Jim Anstey have done as they've been told. They were told, and in terms, by a very important person. Barrington Smythe is childishly ambitious; he'd give most things for three letters after his name. They needn't be good ones: a C.B.E. would do. So Smythe won't chatter. And Jim Anstey is the best sort of scientist, a solid citizen and a solid four on any golf course.' Russell smiled dourly. 'Besides, I know no rule of commercial morality obliging you to tell your major creditor that you're on the threshold of something enormous.'

'Tricky,' Mortimer said.

'Security often is. Baker and Looe quite definitely are.' Russell lit his pipe. 'The big bright boy of Baker and Looe

is a man called Sabin Scott. Have you heard of him too?"

'I've just spent a fortnight hanging about the City. When I wasn't at Bush House.'

'Then I take it the answer is yes. There's a file on him, you know.'

'I've read it.'

'Anything new to add?'

'No, I'm afraid not.'

'Any further information which could be added to that dossier I should be something more than grateful for.' Russell spoke with a hint of formality: the interview was over. Major Mortimer rose; he clicked his almost imperceptible click; he withdrew.

He went back to his room, thinking hard. . . . So Russell wanted more on Sabin Scott. That would be difficult, even risky. Finally he made his decision; he picked up the scrambled telephone, making two urgent calls. The first produced apologies, finally an excuse. To the second a woman's voice said simply: 'I'll do what I can.'

Sabin Scott was in a cabin on the Dover steamer. He hadn't the least intention of crossing the Channel; he had simply been summoned, which was very unusual, and he had obeyed unhesitatingly.

The man he was talking to wore oversize dark glasses, and he was saying in careful but fluent English: 'Where have we got to?'

'We'll be making Bonavias an offer next week.'

'How much?'

Sabin Scott told him.

'I should think that was about right, about the actuarial valuation of the assets—the family holdings and the freehold of a valuable property in the City of London.'

'We've been as thorough as possible. It's taken some time.'

But the man in dark glasses ignored him; he went on speaking, almost to himself. 'The goodwill must be worth very little, for they're certainly not first class still. Not that

they're stupid about their investments when the chance still comes their way. We know of one very good one indeed.'

'We've allowed for that too in the price.'

'The strictly commercial price?'

'Of course. Radarmic is incalculable politically.'

'Not to me.' The man in dark glasses considered; finally he said: 'You may not get them for that.'

'You think Bonavias know about Radarmic?'

'No, almost certainly not. I know because I spend a great deal of money finding out such things. Your security people will certainly know too, so it's equally sure that Radarmic will have been told to keep their mouths shut. No, it's very long odds that Bonavias don't yet realize what Radarmic really means.'

'Then why shouldn't they take the commercial price?'

Dark glasses didn't trouble to hide sarcasm; he said: 'You're good at commerce, aren't you? But there are other things too—pride, family pride, personalities. A man called Walter Hillyard. . . . No, you may not get them for the straight commercial price.'

'We could try.'

'Of course you could try. But I didn't come to your detested country simply to say that. I came to tell you of urgency. If my information is right, and mostly it is, we haven't unlimited time.' The thick-lipped mouth set suddenly. 'Start them,' it said, 'at twenty per cent above the figure you've just given me.'

Sabin Scott said involuntarily: 'It's too much.'

'Not to me.'

'But. . . .'

The man in dark glasses smiled faintly. 'That's what you said about the brewery. And that was just a brewery.'

Sabin Scott was silent. Dark glasses had made a great deal of money from what had once been that brewery. And that had just been money.

It was evident this wasn't.

But he was speaking again. 'So add twenty per cent and start them at that. If they decline, you're to let me know.'

You know how you can contact me. I don't think they *will* refuse, but the details are for you.' For the first time the man in dark glasses took them off. He had very small eyes, close set, and a roll of fat above his collar. It lessened a little as he stood. 'The details are for you,' he said again. He was suddenly contemptuous. 'That's why I keep you.'

Sabin Scott said crisply: 'I don't have to work for keep.' 'No? But you do work, you know, and for me. Then why is that?'

The fat-necked man was a bully.

'We have something in common.'

'So?'

'Accounts to settle—long, long scores.'

For the first time the other seemed genuinely interested. 'I *have* bills to pay still.' He looked up suddenly. 'They're bills against your country.'

'I don't think about countries, only people I hate.'

Dark glasses said slowly: 'I won't ask why. I needn't. Hate is enough.' The heavy head nodded, finally, dismissively. 'Good day.'

Sabin Scott left the cabin, walking towards the gangway. At its head a man and a woman were quarrelling. The man was a good deal older and the woman was in tears. Sabin Scott, who was observant, saw that she wore no wedding ring. The man looked disappointed, and he was evidently angry.

Scott shrugged. He went past them down the gangway, hearing them follow him. The man was still arguing.

Sabin Scott climbed into his car.

Later, driving to London, he thought he saw them in a small saloon behind him. The man was driving and the woman seemed to have stopped crying. But she was holding something to her mouth still.

It had been a glimpse in a mirror—no more. And that was as well. In her lap the woman carried a portable radio, but she wasn't listening. Instead she was talking—smoothly, clearly, urgently.

2

THE enormous motor-car was saved from vulgarity by a restraint in detail so exquisite as to make it a little boring. For all its careful good taste Walter Hillyard privately considered it ostentatious, but this evening he climbed in gratefully. He was tired and would have admitted it, and it would be pleasant to be driven straight home. The splendid vehicle was one of his perks, one of the perquisites of a director of Bonavias. They paid him very generously, but the Special Commissioners bled him no less handsomely, and once, for amusement, he had calculated that to buy and maintain this discreet absurdity privately he would have needed at least another ten thousand a year. Which of course would be ridiculous: it would be making a present to the Inland Revenue. So the Rolls was on the firm, but not wholly from respect for Walter Hillyard, not altogether for services rendered. For in the world of merchant banking cars were extremely important. A Jaguar was one thing, one sort of symbol, a Bentley another, the value of both, their nuances, precisely calculated, just as precisely known. For Bonavias—a director of Bonavias—it had to be a Rolls. It had to be, since the rules required it. They were unwritten and, come to that, even to refer to them was something of a gaffe. But they existed—childish, Walter considered—but recognized inescapably. For Walter Hillyard it was a chauffeur-driven Rolls.

On the firm, he remembered, smiling. He didn't know the details. That was for the chief accountant and the specialist in taxation. They seemed very good at their jobs.

The chauffeur shut the door behind him with the sharp-firm click of superlative coachwork, and Walter Hillyard began to relax. He looked at George Mears' broad back.

George Mears went with the car, but he was also something more, for he was Walter's part-time servant. And something yet again, since he was a very old friend.

They had met in the war, and Walter, half asleep, for he had the gift of controlled napping, sank into reverie and the preposterous upholstery. He considered that he had been lucky about the war, or perhaps it had only been honest. Whatever it was it had worked for him wonderfully.

Which, considering that he had never gone higher than sergeant-major, was remarkable.

In half-sleep his smile broadened, for he was conscious of the snobberies which he despised. It would have been easy for Walter Hillyard to have arranged himself a commission in the Brigade—easy and, for himself, quite false. Instead he had joined his county yeomanry regiment as a trooper; moreover he had refused a commission for what had seemed the valid reason that he hadn't thought he would make a particularly good officer. It was his habit to think for himself. Later they had transferred him to the parent and regular regiment. He had risen to Warrant Officer First Class and, though he said it, he hadn't been a bad one. A D.C.M. and bar. . . .

Unconsciously he chuckled. Goodness, they thought that chic! What a horrible word for a horrible thing. Nevertheless it existed. A sort of Gresham's Law, a kind of inflation that hit the Brigade of Guards. All those national servicemen in red and dark blue ties on every conceivable and inconceivable occasion, practically sleeping in them. . . . Once you could get a commissionnaire's job simply by wearing the thing: now you couldn't get a clerk's. But Walter Hillyard—Bonavias, you know—the Seventh/Seventeenth. Warrant Officer One, old boy. Damned good D.C.M.—no, two. Yes, he's in Bratt's, but I suppose they couldn't have him in the Cavalry. Never commissioned, you see. Droll, don't you think?

Walter thought it droll—silly but undeniably droll. And something as well, since he found it convenient. It marked him as a card, and cards, when successful, had their

margin of liberty, a tiny freedom to be themselves. It wasn't much, but in the City it was something.

Not that it helped a lot—not when the heat came on.

He woke at his accustomed place along the Great West Road, reaching for a button in the back of the driver's seat. An electric motor whirred discreetly and the lower half of Mears' partition, hinged at the bottom, began a deliberate descent. When it was flat the motor stopped. Walter was looking at what he had heard called a cocktail cabinet, looking disapprovingly, for the contrivance struck him as in very bad taste. There were holders for bottles and most sorts of glass, a good deal of chrome; but at the moment the cabinet contained a single serviceable tumbler, a siphon and a bottle of Scotch whisky.

Walter mixed himself a whisky, drinking contentedly. In a mile or two they would be across Staines Bridge; then they would skirt the roundabout, turn left and, unexpectedly, left again. At the end of a shabby cul-de-sac was an unpretentious pub. There he would drink a couple with George Mears. It was a moment of the day he always looked forward to. George Mears, at least, was real.

They had been using the Lion for long enough for the customers to have got used to them. At first they had been a sensation—the car, the uniformed driver, the quietly dressed gentleman of something under fifty. But both had excellent pub manners. Walter had bought drinks but hadn't offered them; Mears hadn't called him sir. They had taken their drinks to a bench by the window, chatting neither too loudly nor so quietly as to seem secretive. Now nobody took the window seats till they had gone, or not on weekdays. They had been accepted, Rolls and all.

This evening they carried their beer and whisky into the pale sunlight of a late May evening by the window. George Mears drank a good deal of beer, but it had never put weight on him. He was a man with powerful shoulders, solidity in person, but he wasn't fat. He drank half of his pint quickly,

knowing that another was bespoken; then he said easily: 'You're looking tired.'

'I feel it,' Hillyard said. It wasn't something he would have admitted to everybody.

'Worse day than usual?'

'Much worse.'

'They pay you,' Mears said dryly.

'They pay me very well. Oddly enough I reckon I earn it.'

'There's plenty doesn't.'

Walter raised his eyebrows. 'In the City?' he asked.

'No—pinkies, I meant.'

'I didn't know you were a pink.'

The amiable insult Mears ignored. 'Not that I envy you myself. I'll start envying you when I want your job. That'll be when I think I can do it. That'll be never.'

Walter asked idly: 'What puts you off it?'

'The . . . the worry.'

'You agree it exists?'

'Of course. I told you I wasn't a wet.'

'I never thought it.' Walter smiled. 'So I know about you. Now tell me about myself. Do you think I'm a typical banker?'

Mears raised shrewd eyes. 'Do your pals?'

'What pals?'

'Your City pals.'

'I'm not sure I have any.'

'The chaps you work with then.' Mears hesitated. 'Your col . . . colleagues.'

'I'm afraid they often don't.'

'Your pals is right.'

Walter Hillyard said reflectively: 'It's sometimes a handicap. A . . . a weakness.'

'Mostly you seem to ride it. Not tonight, though.'

'You said I was looking tired.'

'You look properly peaked.'

Walter Hillyard allowed himself a shrug. Lord Laver, his chairman, was an excellent business man, and Gutteridge

knew his curious ropes. But the real work fell on himself. Not that the managers didn't do their business admirably. What there was of it.

Walter was long past pretending that Bonavias was quite what once it had been.

They sat on in the fading evening and the comfortable silence of unlikely friendship. Mears knew that his master would talk again, but only when he wanted to. Mears wouldn't prompt him. He'd simply wait his time.

Presently Walter Hillyard noticed his glass. 'Beer again?' he asked. He knew the answer.

'Yes, please.'

Walter brought the glass back, and his own. Sipping his whisky he said: 'I've had a day.'

'I can see it.'

'There's been trouble at the office.'

'Isn't there always?'

'Yes, in a way. That, as you twitted me, is what I'm paid for. But in a surprising number of things an affair like Bonavias practically runs itself.'

'I know it's old.'

'Four generations all told—not more than other bankers. I'm proud of it, though. Too much, perhaps.' There was a considerable silence before Walter Hillyard went on: 'There's been talk of an amalgamation.' He didn't think it necessary to add anything about 'in confidence'.

George Mears both noticed this and liked it. 'An amalgamation? One of them takeovers?'

Walter couldn't help smiling. 'Nobody takes over Bonavias.'

'Call it what you like. What *did* you call it?'

'An amalgamation—a merger.'

'And who wants to merge with Bonavias? The Bank of England?'

'Not the Bank of England. Baker and Looe.'

'The Bakerloo?'

Walter was surprised. 'You knew they called them that?'

'Look,' Mears said slowly, 'you can't know much about

my day. I drive you to London most days and I call for you at half-past five. That's over seven hours to kill. I take the car to a garage and have anything done which I can't do myself. While it's there I wash it—we've an arrangement. Then I have a beer, or maybe two, and something cold to eat. Afterwards I mooch about and perhaps have a nap in the car. At five I know where I can get another beer. So do a lot of others. We've the same sort of guvnor, and we talk, you know.'

'About the Bakerloo?'

George Mears said demurely: 'I've heard the name.'

'What else, if I may ask it?' Walter Hillyard hadn't intended to sound sharp.

'They're very new.'

'They're new all right.'

'And they're very up-and-coming.'

'Decidedly. . . . Anything else?'

George Mears said reflectively, finally: 'They say they're pretty hot.'

'Yes,' Walter said, 'they're pretty hot.' He rose rather suddenly, looking at his watch in half apology. 'And so am I. I need a bath.'

Outside the Lion George Mears was at once the chauffeur; he held the door of the Rolls for Walter Hillyard. 'Home, sir?' he asked.

'Yes, please. Straight home.'

Walter was feeling a little better, conscious of tension eased. But he was too much the realist to put much faith in it. Baker and Looe weren't something to be smothered by a couple of whiskies with George Mears. If Baker and Looe really went after him. . . .

The Bakerloo. Sabin Scott in particular.

Mears dropped him by the little lodge and Walter Hillyard walked up the curving drive towards the house. It was another moment he looked forward to. In winter the bare hedges and the naked trees satisfied a sense of line, and in

the thrusting finery of spring their opulence delighted him. But he had always disliked the house. It was the Victorian folly of a rich clergyman, and though an architect had since smoothed its grosser extravagances, to Walter Hillyard it was still a depressing, faintly a formidable house. Inside it was furnished in the Benenden-Vassar Georgian of Cynthia Hillyard's taste. It perfectly became her, but not, he knew, himself. Only his study was really comfortable.

It was called The Old Rectory, and not by his own choice. The name in fact annoyed him. . . . Some poop made a piece in the City, buying himself a largish house in the sort of country which was really outer suburbia. And at once it became The Old Rectory. A generation ago it would have been Something Court or Somebody's Place. Nowadays that was considered snobbish, but Old Rectory wasn't less so. This particular house had happened to be built by a parson, but most of them had never seen a dog collar. Nevertheless Old Rectory *had* something; had, he decided, the undertones of country roots for rich rootless bagmen.

Walter Hillyard detested snobbery, but concrete snobberies amused him. He would have admitted that he collected them. He knew it was a failing in a director of Bonavias, for in the City, the conventions, the unquestioned acceptance of them, could be very important indeed.

He shrugged; he wasn't a good acceptor and he knew that too. It was nothing to be proud of, but nothing to regret. Just, in the pinches, another weakness.

He couldn't afford them now.

He let himself in quickly and the Italian maid received him. A director of Bonavias must at least speak Italian, and Walter spoke it well. The maid fussed over him agreeably, then said: 'The honourable signora has gone out. She left a letter.'

Walter chuckled, conscious as he did so that it was his first laugh of the day. It was something he resented. But he always enjoyed the honourable signora. It was an improvement on honourable lady which was what the cook, mistakenly, innocent of insult, called Cynthia Hillyard . . . The

Honourable Cynthia Hillyard. *Née* Bonavia. Old Laver's daughter, in fact. Lord Laver, his chairman.

He saw that the maid was still standing, puzzled by his silence, holding a silver tray. He took the letter from it, slitting the envelope quickly. In his wife's firm writing, rather large, he read that she had gone to London. She had taken the little car and hoped it would be all right. He wasn't to wait up for her. And that was all.

But he wasn't surprised. Cynthia had always been very social; moreover she was a great joiner. That she had acquired at Vassar. She had a dozen committees in London, a hundred friends or at least acquaintances. Recently they had seemed to be increasing. He said to the maid in his excellent Italian: 'My wife will be out tonight—I don't know if she told you. Please ask cook to send me something to the study. In half an hour.'

'Shall I run the signore's bath?'

'Do not disturb yourself. I'll do it myself.'

The maid made the faintest curtsy, slipping away in the felt shoes of her race and calling. Walter Hillyard took a drink to his bath and later, in his study, ate at a round table. He was happy with Italians and admired them, but he had no fancy for Italian food. He ate steak, fresh beans from his own garden, beautifully cooked, and cheese. No potatoes. Fried he found them fattening, and otherwise insipid. There was a bottle of solid Burgundy and a judicious brandy at the end. Come to think of it he had eaten much the same, though less, for lunch. That had been in the directors' room at Bonavias. They still called it the Parlour.

He read a recent novel which annoyed him, and at half-past eleven went upstairs. He had a separate bathroom, and there was a bed in the dressing-room, though he never used it unless, coming in late, he wanted to avoid disturbing Cynthia. He couldn't have said why they shared a bed still: it was more years than he cared to count since they had done more with a bed than sleep in it. Perhaps some compulsion held them both, some reluctance to face acknowledgement. He shook his head. That wouldn't be like Cynthia at all.

Cynthia was definite, Cynthia knew her mind. She'd have kicked him out fast enough, no punches pulled, if she'd found him distasteful. If sentiment existed it was wholly his. It was an emotion alien to Cynthia Bonavia.

He woke in the small hours, conscious that she was beside him. The night was warm and the heating in the bedroom excellent. Cynthia had thrown the sheet off. She was sleeping facing him, quite straight as she always slept, one arm bent on the pillow, her head in its hand. Her nightdress was the well-bred woman's apology to nakedness. There was a moon.

Walter Hillyard drew a sudden breath. She had a lovely body still, firm, almost virginal in its taunting sheath. Absurd to think they had two boys at Eton. Damn it, he'd married her. He hadn't had to—not to get into Bonavias. There was his own connection still. It wasn't so much by now, but Bonavias weren't people to deny a family connection. Besides, he'd been pretty bright: they'd have taken him anyway and glad to. That wasn't conceit but fact: he'd been in Bonavias six years before he'd married Cynthia. He hadn't had to marry her, it hadn't been a fix.

He put out his hand.

Very slowly he dropped it again. He couldn't be sure. She'd never been passionate, or if she had he'd never stirred her. It had been all of four years. Suppose she protested, said things. . . .

He felt his stomach curl.

But he looked at her again, regret and uncertainty struggling. He had forty-five years—well, forty-six next month. He was forty-six and in bed with his wife. . . . She shouldn't have done it—not that moon, not that preposterous, transparent rag. He could split it with one hand, there where it had slipped, a gage to his manhood. Tomorrow it would be fun to buy her another, a terribly expensive one. Her waist was tiny still. An arm would go round it easily, quickly, holding her. . . .

A sound escaped him which was almost a groan. He couldn't be *sure*. He couldn't be sure, he told himself, and

distantly another Walter Hillyard mocked him. It mocked him with merciless words.

It wasn't that he wasn't sure. To hell with being sure. He simply didn't dare.

Deliberately he turned on his other side, away from regret. It was a very long time before he slept.

Cynthia hadn't been quite asleep. She had heard Walter move and, peeping through eyelashes, had seen his hand go out to her. She had seen it drop too.

... That was Walter all over.

She would have confessed to a certain excitement. She had never been in love with him but she had never resented love, simply slipped from the habit. She had peeped at him again. He was still decidedly presentable. All his own hair, greying a little but it suited him, all his own teeth. He never ate sugar, and he took exercise with discretion and without boring himself, or her, with tiresome exercises. His figure was as good as hers, and with very much less trouble. She had watched other women trying not to betray themselves. . . . Hell, he was going to rape her—that's what it came to. It would be an experience and one not intolerable. She had almost put a hand to her hair—a woman might as well look decent for it. It was her business to give pleasure: a woman who couldn't might as well be dead. Of course she hadn't been expecting it, and really one never knew. There were two boys at school, but second families were wildly fashionable; second families had very exalted precedents. Now he was condemning her, sentencing her to something she didn't want: more committees, more women's lunches, another man perhaps. . . . It would probably be some cad.

An old-fashioned word, she remembered, as Walter turned from her. And so was gentleman. Her husband was a gentleman. A gentleman, blast him. She had felt his desire, though she hadn't shared it. Now she felt only exasperation. All he had had to do was put an arm round her, pull off a rag of nightdress. He was very much stronger, in excellent

condition. She'd have grumbled a little, naturally—after four years a certain decency demanded it—but she wouldn't have called the maids. They were Italian anyway and wouldn't have helped her: probably, she thought smiling, they'd have helped Walter Hillyard. Not that it would have been necessary. Not force but the merest show of it. Damn him, he must know that.

Apparently he hadn't; he was a gentleman. Her sons had his breeding and his fine good looks. She hoped they had her own blood too. Her father was Lord Laver now, but that hadn't changed the Bonavias. Bonavias were tough. Not gentlemen, certainly, or not like Walter. Thank heaven for that. In a hard, hard world Bonavias did very nicely.

In her turn she rolled over, away from Walter, furious.

3

IT was very late, but not too late for the Security Executive. Robert Mortimer had run Charles Russell to earth in his flat, and Russell was listening intently. ‘You took a risk,’ he was saying, ‘putting a tail on a man like Scott.’

‘It was a very good tail.’

‘No doubt. And it seems to have come up with something.’

‘There wasn’t time for anything fancy—no tap on the cabin or anything like that. But it was Steiffer all right. We had that checked when he went ashore at Calais, dark glasses and all. And it’s certain Scott met him. That wouldn’t have been for nothing. We don’t know what they said but—’

‘But Sabin Scott met Steiffer.’ Colonel Russell looked at his nails. ‘What have you heard about Steiffer?’

‘Rumours,’ Mortimer said.

‘They’re not to be despised—not in our business. Very often we have to live on them. . . . What rumours?’

‘What I told you the other day. That Steiffer’s the man behind Baker and Looe.’

‘Who are something more than interested in Bonavias?’

‘Yes.’

‘Who in effect control Radarmic?’

‘Yes again.’

‘Who in turn are extremely important?’

‘From our point of view most uncomfortably important.’

‘Awkward,’ Russell said. ‘Very awkward indeed politically.’

He sank into a long silence, for he knew a great deal about the Steiffers. They had been big—too big to break. The French had tried and the Americans, the French much the harder since they had much the stronger motive. They’d never quite succeeded. That sort of empire, international—

half industrial, half financial—was an octopus: cut off one tentacle and another appeared from nowhere. In their unspectacular way the British had probably done the Steiffers more damage than the others, for at least they had brought old Steiffer, the old Count, to trial. Not that he had ever been convicted. He had cut his jugular with a razor blade smuggled into his cell. Nobody had been pinned for that, even a decade later. That was typical Steiffer staffwork.

And now Steiffers were a power again, a power within a considerable Power.

It wasn't a safe assumption that they had changed their spots. The current Steiffer wasn't your modern milk-and-water industrialist. He was a Steiffer still, old and tough and dirty and rough.

And he didn't love the English.

Charles Russell came to life again slowly. Finally he said: 'I'll have to report this up, of course. Oh, decidedly up.' He smiled without amusement. 'They're not going to like it. They're not going to like it at all.'

Charles Russell relit his pipe, settling to his problem. He knew that in security you never knew; you could never be certain what hand you would have to play next. A year or two ago the pattern would have been all too recognizable. For here was Radarmic, a first-class firm and in reach of something vital, and Radarmic was J. B. Smythe, a business man, but also Jim Anstey, a boffin. A particularly brilliant one. Russell smiled sourly. A year or two ago they would have been worrying themselves sick about the boffin; they'd have worried about treason in all its unlovely forms; they'd have built up a dossier on Anstey half a yard high. Now they still had to keep an eye on him, for there were standing instructions about any scientist as able as Jim Anstey, but Russell was certain he wasn't a Pontecorvo. For one thing he'd played golf with him and had been handsomely beaten. Jim Anstey liked women and good food; he liked a gamble; he even read *The Gong*. He hadn't a suspect contact—

Russell had checked professionally—and he did have an appetite for life. If he was a phoney he was also a marvellous actor, and phonies mostly weren't. It wasn't so much what they said or did: often they were very clever about that. It was their smell. Sooner or later it came through to the trained nose.

That was a break for security. This wasn't. Russell smelt something and he couldn't place it.

He rose and, crossing to his safe, took from it a file in a yellow cover. There were hundreds such—thousands. Yellows were one below Greens, as Greens were one below Reds. Reds were positive suspects, people whom, if the courts weren't so tiresome about evidence, the Security Executive would gladly have seen prosecuted. Unless, of course, they were earmarked as bait for bigger game: then prosecution would have been avoided, quietly scotched if attempted. There were surprisingly few Reds. And Greens were people suspect by positive association, by proven contact; they were a sort of limbo, a no-man's-land, apt as the evidence came in to be raised to Red or quietly downgraded to Yellow. But Yellows were the bread and butter of the Executive. There were indeed thousands of yellow files, and most of those who owned them would have been outraged if they had known it.

Sabin Scott, for instance, would have been very angry indeed, for it was his file that Russell was reading. It didn't tell him much: on the contrary Russell could if he had wished have added to it, for he had met Scott socially. The papers held the barest facts, enough to type Sabin Scott and little more.

For it *was* a type, Russell had decided, one which wasn't likely to be repeated or, if it were, survive. This particular sub species came from the Dominions, mostly from backgrounds which at first it was reticent about and later romanticized. It had a small hard-won stake which it rapidly ran up. Just after the war that hadn't been too difficult. Cheap money had seen to that, for cheap money had meant inflation. There had been an issue at two-and-one-half per cent which, if it had been marketed by less than a Chancellor,

rigged by less than the Treasury, would have put its promoters away for solid sentences of ten years hard. Naturally if you were stupid enough to buy it, fool enough to trust a government, you lost your shirt. But if you weren't it hadn't been too difficult to make money in something else. Almost any equity would do.

And Sabin Scott had done very much better than average. You didn't get taken on by Baker and Looe on some fly-by-night profits, nor even on a solid fortune alone. You needed brains too, for Baker and Looe thrived on brains. Russell chuckled, for he knew that the Bakerloo wasn't popular in the City. They were new and they had made it—crashed it. They didn't belong to the club: worse, they didn't seem to want to. Russell knew no reason why they should. They had most of the new money: all the new men used them, the takeover boys, the property men, the prodigies of caterers. Baker and Looe were outsiders but they did very good business. They had connections now—new ones, live ones. No wonder they were resented. Most of the old merchant banks had had their private stamping grounds—Overys in Scandinavia, Pettits in South America. Which could hardly be a goldmine nowadays. Not that Pettits in decline had become any less lordly. They were still very grand indeed. They didn't even put 'Pettit Brothers' on their notepaper—beg their pardon, Russell thought, smiling—writing paper: simply '497 Old Broad Street'.

And Baker and Looe were without respect, and that was something serious, a snook at tradition. There had been the affair of that brewery. It had been a fine old family brewing business, something almost sancrosanct to any right-thinker. Three of the others had tried to save it, three of the most powerful. But they hadn't. The price had gone much too high, but Baker and Looe had stood it. Their principals had stood it. Nobody knew for certain where the real money came from, but they had guessed. They were guessing still and so was Russell.

He laughed aloud. . . . The Bakerloo. That sort of crack didn't alter the facts. And he had heard another—Players

versus Gentlemen. That was more like it. The Players had won for years.

He turned again to the file before him. It consisted mostly of press cuttings, and they took the story on, the story of Sabin Scott. . . . Social success or what was so accepted —right parties, right friends, right women. The stage you knew with discretion and only when successful; charities you subscribed to but only when already well supported. Up to a point the precedents fitted, but thereafter they didn't.

Politics, for instance: most Sabin Scotts went into them. For some it was the known and final goal, money only the means to it; others were gently seduced. But mostly it was politics—the fortune made, the discreet absorption into some rising politician's court, the climb on his shoulders. Sometimes he made you a minister, sometimes you were content as *eminence grise*.

And of course private paymaster.

That was the pattern, and in the Executive patterns were important. They were important because the human animal so often followed them. That was something which twenty years of experience had taught Charles Russell. Now it was instinctive. When the pattern was irregular—worse, when it ran true to precedent, then unexpectedly diverged—the wise security officer took notice.

And Scott diverged notably. Charles Russell frowned, remembering an occasion. It had been at Lady Lampeter's. Lady Lampeter was a political hostess, mistress of what she would have called, but not in public, a salon. She was a very insensitive woman but not as insensitive as that. Russell went to her parties, since they amused him. Also he picked things up there, and that was business. The evening had been one of her triumphs, for she had bagged the Prime Minister. Russell had been standing on the edge of a group around him when Sabin Scott had been led up. Lady Lampeter had done it herself. 'Prime Minister,' she had said, 'I don't think you've actually met Sabin Scott.'

The Prime Minister smiled his warmest smile and Russell

hid another. The Prime Minister wasn't a warm man; he was a professional politician and a very successful one; he smiled his warmest smile when his warmest smile was called for, and never otherwise. Russell knew at once that Lady Lampeter was acting on instructions. It was a put-up job.

The Prime Minister gave Sabin Scott the quick firm handshake of the practised handshaker. 'Naturally I've heard of you,' he said.

'You're very kind, sir.'

'Pity we can't interest you in politics.'

'I don't feel I've a flair for them.' Sabin Scott had been deferential but not unduly. He stood solidly, back straight, in very expensive clothes. He was a little under the average height and going a little bald, but he wasn't bad looking. He had splendid shoulders and a tiny colonial twang, difficult to place. Women found it one of his attractions. He was intensely male.

'Nonsense.' The Prime Minister was warmer than ever, very man-to-man. 'A man of your calibre. You could go far, you know.'

On a note of the faintest irony Sabin Scott said smoothly: 'I'm afraid you misjudge me, sir.'

The Prime Minister wasn't put out. He rather liked the chap. This was a negotiation—the fellow wasn't some nonentity. He wanted a proposition and, with that money, he had earned one. Well, he should have it. The Prime Minister lowered his voice a tone. 'There'll be a by-election in a month,' he said. 'Don't tell the world, of course. There's a pretty fair majority.'

Sabin Scott had laughed at him. It was clear he hadn't meant to, but he had laughed. But in an instant he had recovered. He did the only thing possible; he bowed to the Prime Minister and walked away.

Russell had wandered after him. At the bar Scott was drinking a neat whisky. They had met before, and Russell, the older man, said conversationally: 'I don't think he much liked that.'

Scott finished his whisky, helping himself to another.

Normally he drank very little. He was wholly unrepentant; he said almost savagely: 'To hell with what he thinks. Do you think I'm afraid of making enemies?'

Russell said deliberately: 'I should have said you sought them. Enjoyed them.'

Sabin Scott put his drink down, staring at Russell levelly. 'You're a cool old hand.' He smiled unexpectedly. 'I'm not making an enemy of you—not unless I need to.'

'Thank you. I dare say you've enough.'

'What are you getting at?' Scott didn't seem offended.

'What drives Sabin Scott. I don't think it's money, or not now.'

'You're interested?'

'I might be.'

Sabin Scott said calmly: 'Then probably you've guessed.'

He had walked away again.

Charles Russell put his file away, locking the cabinet carefully, shaking his head. People like Sabin Scott worried him, and Sabin Scott plus Steiffer, one using the other, or perhaps an alliance. . . . Its potential was considerable, its power for mischief almost unlimited. Russell smiled wryly. Well, he was paid to worry.

4

WALTER HILLYARD woke next morning at his usual time. Cynthia was sleeping still, and he went into the dressing-room, careful not to look at her, conscious of defeat. He rang the bell and the Italian maid brought tea.

'Ask Mr. Mears to come up, please.'

'Sissignore.'

He drank some of his tea and was shaving as Mears came in. 'Good morning, Mears. I've a dinner tonight. I'll change at the office and sleep in the flat there. Put my things in a bag, please.'

'What sort of dinner, sir?'

'Long coat, bits of metal—the works.'

George Mears said deliberately: 'If we happened to be in the Lion. . . .'

'Let's pretend we're in the Lion.'

'If we'd been in the Lion I'd have said that an early night wouldn't have hurt you.'

'I look as bad as that?'

'Not *bad*—you don't look sick. You look pretty tired, though.' Mears fumbled for a word and finally found it. 'You look strained.'

'I have my stresses.' Walter Hillyard smiled. 'I rather think I told you yesterday. I think we agreed they're what I'm paid for.'

'Very good, sir.'

By unspoken consent they had left the Lion again.

Walter finished dressing and the tea. He never ate breakfast, and they started at once for London, Walter in the back of the superlative Rolls, smoking, reading *The Financial Times*. In his office he did a day's work, aware that it wasn't a good one, and at six o'clock he went upstairs to

change. He took the little lift, cramped, not quite reliable, thinking that it had become a symbol. Bonavias had decided on an enormous motor-car and a very old-fashioned lift, but somehow they were complementary. Perhaps there was sense in it, reason of a sort. In any case there would have been instinctive opposition to changing the lift.

He bathed and dressed in the comfortable directors' flat. There was a bedroom, a small living-room and a very good bath. He climbed into it smiling, thinking that this too was something the accountant and the tax man managed admirably. But as he shaved again he looked at his reflection carefully. George Mears had been right: he did look peaked—not ill but tired. He didn't want dinner at all, and certainly not with the Sparellers. He ought to take a holiday, lie in the sun; he ought to get his guts back. He could go to Ischia again, take Cynthia with him.

His hand on the razor stopped suddenly. He had done that four years ago and it had been wholly disaster—their disaster, but probably mostly his fault. The decline of his marriage had started on that holiday. Cynthia had hated Ischia, demanding a change to Capri. He had refused. Not that he had much liked Ischia. They had been staying at an expensive hotel, and the well-to-do Milanesi, the smug Lombard merchants, had irritated him. It wouldn't have killed him to have moved to Capri, only offended sensibilities which were probably too delicate. But Capri was Capri, a film set. At least these Northern Italian parvenus worked for the money they too confidently spent, but Capri was maharajahs deprived of power but not of all their income; Capri was poets whom nobody had heard of; Capri was poseurs, pederasts....

He had stuck his toes in and refused to move. Cynthia, understandably, had sulked. She had done so with a certain dignity, but undeniably she had sulked. Capri would have suited Cynthia. Capri was nothing if not mundane, and Cynthia, sometimes....

He shook his head disapprovingly, for he had caught himself in disapproval. He hadn't himself a clean bill.

Marriage wasn't an easy profession, and he hadn't been particularly clever at it. You said yes dear, and in a year or two you were a doormat. Or you said no dear, and it was very long odds that you were firm at the wrong moment. He believed now he had been. It wouldn't have cost him much to have indulged her. There was the same sea at Capri, the same quite potable wine. One needn't meet the visitors, the dreadful people.

He finished his dressing and sent for a taxi. He directed it to the Sparellers' Hall.

The Sparellers were a Livery Company—not one of the great ones and they knew it. As with a good many others it had been some time since they had had any connection with the trade whose name they bore: indeed there was by now some doubt about what it had really been. Doubt and some unkindly jokes. The official version was that they had once been spoke-makers. Not wheelwrights, of course: Wheelwrights were different (*Precedence* 68, *Livery* 290). But spoke-makers. A sparell, it appeared, was something between a barrel and a spoke. It was a little obscure, perhaps, but so much the better. That was the authorized version, but there were others. One of the least damaging was that the Sparellers had been makers of chastity belts. There was one in Venice in the Doge's Palace, a horrible, spiked, appalling thing. A man would have been crazy and a woman. . . .

It was unfortunate that it happened to be stamped with something remarkably like the Sparellers' arms. Not that you could see them, even if you had known your heraldry. The dreadful object was under glass, its markings hidden. The present Master had fixed that, and it had cost him much money. As it happened he had been elected for just that service to his fellow Sparellers.

Whatever they may once have been. . . . Not that it mattered now. They were a Livery Company, but not a great one. Moreover they knew it.

As a result they tried too hard. There was a beadle

in medieval dress, a great deal of spurious ceremony at not specially distinguished dinners. There were near-Knellers of past worthies, invented where they hadn't been forgotten. There was a ton of silver, a loving cup passed with elaborate ritual. Dinner was by candlelight. The band they hired.

But they had rather a nice hall, and it had wholly escaped the bombing. Walter Hillyard went into it now, an improbably powdered footman relieving him of hat and coat. He climbed to what he knew was called the ante-chamber, and the beadle announced him. There were a good many men drinking sherry—gin would have been unthinkable though Walter would have preferred it—and an air of too-decorous whoopee. The Master received him formally. 'The ladies will join us at dinner,' he said.

Walter was astonished; he hadn't expected women. He must have shown his surprise, for the Master, misunderstanding it, said stiffly: 'Just one or two, you know. I—er, we—have power to relax in exceptional circumstances. Just the wife of the guest of honour—I think you know Bob Parratt—and the ladies of, er, the elected officials of the Company.' The capital was almost audible. 'I'm sorry we were unable to invite your own lady.'

Walter said easily: 'Not at all', thinking that he'd had a let-off. Nothing would have persuaded Cynthia into the Sparellers' Hall. And 'Invite your own lady'. . . . It was terrible. It was vintage Spareller.

The beadle formed them up and they processed into the hall. In the gallery the band scraped at a martial air. They took their places but stayed standing. The women weren't there yet, and the beadle went away.

But in a moment he was back again, solemnly leading nine women. Unconsciously Walter stiffened. This was an outrage, even for the Sparellers. Nine miserable women walked up the long line of tables and a hundred and twenty men watched them. Two of them were well worth watching. In no other country could it have happened, and in England only at the Sparellers. A hundred and twenty men stared, trying not to seem to, at nine women.

It was fortunate that sherry was a depressant.

A nondescript clergyman said an elaborate Latin grace in an Oxford accent which he hadn't acquired at Oxford. He was wearing academic dress with a hood which Walter didn't recognize, and the firewatchers' medal. They called him the Chaplain, but he slipped away quietly. He had the Sparellers' two guineas in his pocket and he was grateful for them, but the Sparellers weren't going to waste their food on him.

They ploughed into the Sparellers' dinner. The wine was excellent—more sherry with the soup, an admirable Jesuitengarten, a Calon-Ségur which you were lucky to buy outside Bordeaux itself. Later there would be Champagne, and it would probably be a Krug; then port of the most solid, and an impeccable brandy. But the food wasn't up to it. There was a boring soup, sole fussed about in a fashion which no French miller would have tolerated from his wife's kitchen. At the moment there were cutlets with the splendid claret. Later there would be chicken, and the pretentious near-French rubric wouldn't disguise the tasteless broiler. Then fruit salad to please the ladies and an English savoury. It was a caterer's meal—quite good catering and undeniably expensive—but an uncrossable mile from honest good food.

Presently there was a terrible fuss over the royal toast. Walter sat down at last and lit a cigar.

The Master stood up, introducing Bob Parratt. He took far too long about it, but the junior minister went on smiling. A junior minister had to. It didn't seem to be a strain, or if it was he hid it professionally. Finally he was allowed to get up. There was a polite clap, not too protracted, and Walter settled to listen.

He listened in mounting astonishment, for Bob Parratt gave them the lot; he spared them nothing. . . . The great traditions of the City of London, the Livery Companies not the least of them. Tradition—ah! Intellectuals sneered thinly but you—no, we—could afford to ignore them. For we knew where we stood, our roots reaching deep into a

splendid history. Service, always service. The Trained Bands, the Honourable Artillery Company—a little bow, here, to the Master, who had served with that regiment, a smile, a well-timed pause for the applause which came—but always and in whatever form that fine thing service. The heart of the country was sound still, and the heart of this great City. . . .

Walter Hillyard stared down into the dark hall. Bob Parratt was sparing them nothing, but they were lapping it up contentedly. His own nerves shrieked but a hundred and twenty men were silent. Walter Hillyard envied them. The dais was eighteen inches higher than the body of the hall, and those eighteen inches made him uncomfortable. He was looking down and he hadn't any right to. They were a little stupid, more than a little commonplace; the Sparellers was a surrogate for the schools and universities they mostly hadn't had, for the clubs they would have liked to join but couldn't. Bogus, a sham, a false pretentious thing. . . .

Perhaps. But in that hall was a solid unquestioning strength. They didn't have doubts and they were therefore strong. They had something which he had not. He needed it, too; he could have used it just now.

Later than he would have liked Walter Hillyard walked back to Bonavias. It was perhaps half a mile, but he was conscious that the effort was unwelcome. He went to bed but woke in the small hours conscious, now, of something more than a malaise. He tried to be sick but could not; he cursed the Sparellers. That fish had been far too fussy: probably it hadn't been fresh. He went to bed again and finally slept, but not before decision. Mears had been right: he didn't look too good; worse, he had lost an accustomed edge. Come to think of it he hadn't had a check-up for a year. At his age that was certainly too long.

He took a taxi to Doctor Macrae next morning. He was a very good doctor and Walter liked him personally. It wasn't a fashionable practice, but Doctor Macrae made a

very good income. It was a practice for shrewd men and women, good judges of another man. Doctor Macrae had passed their tests, and one prosperous business man would send him another. He wasn't a specialist and didn't pretend to be, but he was an excellent physician. He had a comfortable Scottish burr and a huge knowledge of human nature. For formalist psychiatry he owned a vast contempt. He would explain that he didn't need it. He knew a loony when he saw one, and the rest was mostly long words for matters which good priests and doctors had known about for centuries.

As Walter came in Macrae said bluntly: 'I can tell you one thing without looking at you. It's not much for your guineas, but it's important. . . . Take a holiday.'

'I look as ill as that?'

'You don't look ill at all, you just look tired.' Macrae smiled his comfortable smile. 'I'm a physician, remember—rather an old-fashioned one. I have colleagues who consider me a menace.'

Walter laughed. 'But *you* have the patients.'

'I have the paying patients. Not all men are fools. You learn that doctoring.'

Doctor Macrae went over Walter carefully—mouth, nose and ears, then chest and heart. He did things to Walter's still trim stomach; he purred in pleasure at his reflexes. 'Admirable.' He took his blood pressure and purred again; he felt his prostate, washing his hands meticulously. 'Normal for size and consistency. Now put your clothes on. Oh'—it had been an afterthought—'and leave me a little water.'

Walter Hillyard did so. He dressed again and, in the doctor's comfortable chair, asked: 'What's the verdict?'

'Excellent. You've a first-class body and you evidently take care of it. Not too much care—that's fatal—but the sensible care of a sensible man. Regular but not excessive exercise. I can see that you watch what you eat. Not too much starch, and very little sugar, I should say.'

'That's about it. That's about all.'

'And quite enough. You'll probably live to eighty, but. . . .'

'But what?'

'I still think you should take that holiday.' For a second Macrae hesitated. 'I said you looked tired, but it's a very loose word. I think you look worried.'

'I've worries, yes.'

'Most men in your position have. Lie in the sun a bit. The sun's very good for worries. You've Italian connections, haven't you?'

'A raft of them.'

'Then go—oh, anywhere. Ischia. . . .'

Walter said involuntarily: 'I couldn't stand Ischia again.'

'You've been there? I dare say it's pretty boring. If you want something gayer, then why not Capri?'

'Yes,' Walter said slowly, 'I might try that.'

He might indeed, he thought: it might not be too late. He looked at his watch. 'I've an appointment. . . .'

'Quite. And you shouldn't have.' Doctor Macrae stood up, his manner changing slightly. 'We're professional men and I'm speaking professionally. I advise you to take that holiday. If I may say so I'd *like* you to.'

'I'll try,' Walter said.

'I advise you to try hard.'

5

WALTER HILLYARD hadn't expected Sir Thomas Gutteridge to be quite so heavy-handed, but he chose that evening for one of his best performances of ex-Treasury insensitivity. For that was where Bonavias had found him. It had been Lord Laver's idea to hire him, since Lord Laver, who had many friends, detested what he scathingly called contacts; and in the world of government offices which he particularly disliked any contact would have repelled him. Moreover mistrust would have been mutual. Lord Laver was shrewd but forthright; he didn't talk the language of Whitehall nor want to, and in the close emasculated circle of senior civilians that was a serious handicap. It was a handicap because it was a criticism, unspoken but not the less deadly, and senior civil servants didn't much fancy criticism, especially from a world of affairs which they affected to despise but privately were frightened of.

So Lord Laver had chosen Sir Thomas Gutteridge for the qualities which he personally disliked but needed. Sir Thomas was cautious and earnest—deadly, destructively right-thinking. He also had an excellent opinion of himself; he genuinely believed that Bonavias had chosen him for his high knowledge of the financial mysteries.

They had hired him on terms both delicate and, to Lord Laver, most convenient. He was on the board of course—Sir Thomas would hardly have accepted otherwise—and for that he had needed five qualifying shares. So Lord Laver had let him have them. More precisely he had lent him the money to buy them, though under a covenant, expertly drawn by expert lawyers, that he could never sell them except to the persons named. And these were Bonavias or Hillyards. Sir Thomas took his dividends on his shares, but he paid to

Lord Laver an almost equal interest on the loan. His salary was moderate, his perquisites negligible. No Rolls for Tom Gutteridge.

If Sir Thomas had been other than a Treasury pundit—say a simple business man—he might have realized that in fact they had hired him at something below his value. But he didn't think like that. On the contrary he was a director of Bonavias. One of the three, you know. That was important to Sir Thomas Gutteridge.

Lord Laver knew him well by now, and he could see this evening that he had something to say, something he *must* say. Sir Thomas was slave to some curious compulsions, though the word would have much offended him. It was no good trying to stop him. Lord Laver knew that, though he always did his best.

It was the pleasant custom of Bonavias for the directors to meet in the Parlour every evening at five. The dining-table had been removed by the ancient waiter and the stiff, starched housekeeper whose beautiful cooking belied her gracelessness. But the sideboard was there still and many glasses. The idea was a drink before they parted for the evening. Serious business was seldom discussed but it was often indicated. Then, on a good night's sleep, they could talk of it more easily next morning. It was a civilized arrangement for civilized men.

But in Bonavias' sense Sir Thomas wasn't civilized. Lord Laver inspected him from under formidable eyebrows. Gutteridge was in labour; the man was going to drop one. Lord Laver, not very hopefully, asked him: 'Will you have a drink?'

'Just a small whisky perhaps. A very small one.'

Lord Laver poured an enormous whisky.

'Really, I. . . .'

'It's not going to poison you.'

Walter took a whisky himself, and for a moment they stood by the sideboard. Gutteridge said in his Polonius voice: 'If you could spare me a minute. There is something. . . .'

Lord Laver pulled out a very old-fashioned watch. 'It's

pretty late. Tomorrow, perhaps. . . .’ But he didn’t sound optimistic.

‘It’s important.’

Lord Laver took another whisky and a chair. ‘Proceed,’ he said resignedly. ‘Pray.’

‘It’s this rumour.’

‘What rumour?’

‘Surely we know of only one.’

But Lord Laver wasn’t going to make it easy. He knew what Gutteridge meant, but it was his opinion that this wasn’t a matter Sir Thomas had been hired for. The man was getting above himself. Lord Laver said crisply: ‘All right then, there’s only one. What is it?’

‘That Baker and Looe would like to merge with us.’

‘I’ve heard it.’

‘Then surely. . . .’ Sir Thomas’s voice tailed away.

‘Then surely what?’

‘Surely we should formally deny it.’

‘Nonsense, my dear fellow. We should look a pack of fools denying a rumour that we haven’t even seen in print.’ Laver looked at Hillyard. ‘You agree?’

‘I entirely agree.’

But Sir Thomas wasn’t taking it. ‘I feel it could damage us.’

‘Of course it can. But we’d do ourselves much more harm by rushing into formal denials of something we know nothing about formally.’

‘Perhaps if one could drop a hint. . . .’

‘Drop it by all means.’ Lord Laver was decided. He was thinking but did not say that dropping hints was partly what Sir Thomas Gutteridge was paid for. ‘Drop it by all means,’ he repeated.

Sir Thomas sighed, conscious that he had neatly stuck himself. Dropping hints wasn’t something he fancied. Anyone might think he was some sort of contact man. In the old days at the Treasury. . . .

In the old days one had given that sort of work to the Press Office. They weren’t very good at it, since nobody

went into a government Press Office unless they had first failed in Fleet Street or in ordinary public relations. Just the same there had been a machine, something one could call on, pass the work on to. In Bonavias there didn't seem to be machinery at all. These people had no use for it; they didn't understand its value, didn't understand. . . .

Of course they were barbarians.

Walter Hillyard walked down to the little courtyard and the waiting car. He had intended to nap in it as usual, but this evening he was restless. It hadn't been a worse day than many recently, and he thought it stupid that he had allowed Tom Gutteridge to irritate him. Moreover it was dangerous. The City could be a killer, and he didn't in his heart believe in it, far less accept its values. So far he hadn't got ulcers and he didn't mean to. A quiet mind was an essential. He turned deliberately to his evening paper.

It was some time before he saw the paragraph, for he read the City page last and sometimes not at all. He read the lines once, almost casually, then again very carefully. It was a statement that Messrs. Baker and Looe intended to make an offer for the share capital of Bonavias, and Walter knew that no newspaper would have risked it in those terms without sanction—specific clearance—from the Bakerloo itself.

. . . So it's coming at last. It wasn't the first move he would have made himself, but then he wasn't Sabin Scott. But it wasn't at all a bad opener.

He considered for perhaps two miles as the splendid vehicle hissed down the bypass; then he picked up the speaking tube. 'Mears?'

'Sir?'

'I'll have to go back. There's something in the paper I must talk to Lord Laver about. Turn round where you can. I'm sorry to be a nuisance.'

Walter knew that he would still find Lord Laver at Bonavias, since it was Lord Laver's habit to play two rubbers of bridge at Bratt's every evening before he went home, and

there wasn't much doing before half-past six. Walter would just about catch him.

He did so, but with little to spare, for Lord Laver was hat in hand. Walter asked shortly: 'Have you seen the evening paper?'

'Never read them.'

Walter showed him the paragraph and Lord Laver read it thoughtfully. 'So we've bolted them,' he said. 'Or have they bolted us?'

'Of course we'll deny it tomorrow. We can now. We ought to.'

Lord Laver seemed astonished. 'Deny it? What for? We'll wait till they do what this rag of yours says; we'll wait for the actual offer. I shouldn't wonder if it didn't arrive in tomorrow's post. Their timing is pretty good.'

'And then?'

'Then we'll consider it.'

Walter said unhappily: 'But the Bakerloo . . .'

'I know. Terrible people.' Lord Laver put his hat on. It emphasised his square, shrewd face, his formidable eyebrows. 'Terrible, new people.' His tone changed unexpectedly. 'And how much business did we do last year—real business?'

'You know as well as I do.'

'Quite.'

Walter said: 'But Bonavias—'

'Is a business like another. It has its price, and if we're offered it, or maybe a little more. . . .'

'You'd let it go?'

'Why not?'

'Not to the Bakerloo. Never.'

Lord Laver, with his hat on, was silent for some time; at last he said: 'I'm your father-in-law besides your chairman. Forgive me. . . . You haven't got ideas, I hope.'

'What sort of ideas?'

'Funny old-fashioned ideas.'

'What's wrong with them?'

But Laver didn't answer directly. 'Tell me,' he asked

quietly, 'do you *like* the City? Have you been *happy* here?'

'I've been content.'

'That wasn't what I asked you.'

Walter Hillyard walked to the sideboard; deliberately he mixed himself a drink; holding it he turned again to Laver. 'It's four generations, you know.'

'That's what I feared you'd say.'

'It's still four generations.'

'It's four generations of Bonavias too. Counting Cynthia, naturally.' Lord Laver tapped his hat. 'Well, there's nothing to do till tomorrow. We'll meet, of course. But I beg you to consider it. I beg you to think it over.' He smiled and walked away. For a man of his weight he moved very easily.

Walter went back into the courtyard and the waiting Rolls. He couldn't blame Lord Laver.

Lord Laver took a taxi to his club, but he didn't find his bridge, or not at once. He was sitting in the card room waiting to cut in when another man slipped into the chair beside him. This man said quietly: 'Could we have a word?'

Lord Laver looked up. He knew Charles Russell, though not very well, but what he knew he liked. He would have called him a good club acquaintance; he played an admirable game of bridge. Lord Laver, moreover, knew Russell's profession. He said unhesitatingly: 'By all means.'

They went into the library. It was empty except for a real property man snoring in an armchair. There were also several notices, minatory, compelling—*Silence*. Russell and Lord Laver ignored them. The property man was quite a new member and they were not: if he ventured to complain the secretary would know what to say to him. Nevertheless they were considerate men, respectful of another's sleep, and they took a sofa in the opposite corner. They spoke in low voices and Russell began. 'I've seen the evening paper.'

'And I've been shown it.'

Lord Laver reflected before he added: 'May I take it you're speaking professionally?'

'I'd be glad if you would.'

Lord Laver was silent again and Russell watched him. He had never been able to place Lord Laver with quite the precision he was accustomed to. He knew that his mother had been Anglo-Italian, which on Russell's calculation made Lord Laver just three-quarters an Italian. But he was English too—nobody could be more so. Lord Laver, superlatively mounted, hunted, and not from obligation. He had a passion for field sports; he was one of the dozen best shots in the country. He had fought in one war, rendering real service in another. His peerage was deserved, not bought. He was seventy, perhaps, ruddy and bluff. He sat on his County Council and he went to an Anglican church. He looked very English indeed; he was an Englishman.

But he didn't always think like one. Somehow you could never be quite sure about Lord Laver.

He was saying now: 'Then what can I do for you?'

'I've an interest in Bonavias. A professional interest.'

'Indeed?'

'I wouldn't like to see it merged. Not with Baker and Looe, that is.'

Laver said easily: 'I take it you can't say why?'

'I can't, I'm afraid.'

Lord Laver didn't seem astonished. 'Then next move to you,' he said.

Charles Russell considered it thoughtfully. 'I think you're a private company.'

'You mean you know we are.'

A nod conceded it.

'Then, if you're interested in us you'll also have done your homework. You'll know how we're held and by whom.'

'Yes, I know that.'

'And so . . .?' Laver asked.

Russell said deliberately: 'You're twenty-five per cent yourself and your uncle has forty. I make that sixty-five.'

Lord Laver chuckled. 'Which in the circumstances you add to a controlling interest? The Bonavias own Bonavias, in fact. But it isn't as simple as that.' He rose and rang a

bell. 'If you're thinking of my uncle Enzio, let me give you some information. That is, if you don't know it already, as I rather suspect you may. Enzio is much the richest of us, but he's also retired. And to my uncle that has certain obligations. He's taken no part in the business for fifteen years and more. He wouldn't think it proper, he wouldn't think it decent to come trampling into it now. If the phrase doesn't strike you as ridiculous, Enzio Bonavia is a man of honour. His sort of honour, but honour. He'd never vote his forty per cent against a working director.'

Russell said quietly: 'I notice you said "against".'

Lord Laver laughed again. 'If I did say "against" I gave you something I didn't mean to. You're pretty damned sharp. If you ever want a job when you retire. . . ."

'You're very kind. I'm flattered. But returning to "against". . . .'

'But it's a question of simple arithmetic. Forty from a hundred leaves sixty. That means that somebody would need just thirty-one per cent in a pinch. If there was one.'

'I make you to have thirty,' Russell said.

'I admit it. Technically I have twenty-five, but there's five with a man called Gutteridge. Who, between these walls, is my creature.'

'Which leaves another thirty still.'

'Just so. There's thirty with Walter Hillyard—fifteen of his own, five in a trust he effectively controls, and ten with his wife.'

'Your daughter,' Russell said.

Lord Laver's eyebrows rose. 'It was a marriage settlement. I *gave* it her.'

There was another silence, and Russell in turn ordered drinks. When the waiter had gone he went on: 'Naturally I can't ask you how you'll vote.'

'Naturally you can't. Nor could I tell you. But I can tell you this and will. We haven't yet had an offer though I think one is coming. Soon.'

'An offer which you'll look at thirty-thirty?'

Lord Laver smiled blandly. 'I didn't say that.'

'Frankly, I know you didn't. That was really rather cheap. If you think I should apologize. . . .'

'Not at all. You've a job like the next man.'

'You're generous. So let's say an offer which *could* go thirty-thirty.'

'That's clear on the arithmetic.'

Russell pulled his moustache. 'Then may I ask you one more question?'

'If you must.' Laver shrugged. 'But you'll realize we're getting pretty close to the quick. I know I have responsibilities—to you, I mean. I know what you do, and I know you're not a personal Paul Pry. But I have others to the firm. And I don't like saying no to you.'

Charles Russell was looking at the splendid Adam chimney piece. Improbable ramsheads stared at improbable urns, improbable swags linked them. It was beautiful. At last he said: 'Suppose there were deadlock, would you admit the fact?'

'It depends what you mean by admit. I'd probably tell *you*, since it seems that you ought to know, but we wouldn't make it public; we wouldn't put it in the papers that the reason Bonavias was refusing an offer was that the board was deadlocked on it. We've no fancy to look foolish.'

'Would you tell Baker and Looe?'

'Perhaps. I think we might have to. A plain refusal could be disingenuous. They might ask for further talks, negotiations; they might raise their price perhaps. And we'd simply be misleading them.' Lord Laver shook his head. 'I don't like them at all—they're new and far from scrupulous—but they're in the same business. We oughtn't to mislead them.'

Charles Russell, suddenly formal, said: 'In the event of a deadlock I should be grateful if you wouldn't tell Baker and Looe. It might be . . . dangerous.' He was watching Lord Laver carefully; it was his impression that the Englishman, incredulous, more than a little distressed, was fighting the Neapolitan. The Neapolitan had understood him but the Englishman was outraged. The Neapolitan came suddenly

uppermost for Lord Laver said simply: 'I dare say I understand you. Thirty and thirty would be deadlock, whereas thirty and, well, say fifteen in the hands of an executor....'

'You put it beautifully.'

'But I'm certain you exaggerate.' The Englishman was on top again. 'This is London—the City of London. Baker and Looe aren't my idea of gentlemen, but I don't think they're assassins.'

'I wasn't thinking only of the Bakerloo.'

Lord Laver sat quite still for perhaps three minutes. At the end of them he said: 'You're very well informed.'

'Perhaps. Not as well as I'd like.'

'You think I'm in any danger?' Lord Laver was matter-of-fact and Russell admired him. At seventy a certain anxiety would have been excusable.

'Not a bit,' Russell said.

'Then if I'm not in danger Hillyard may be. On *your* hypothesis, of course—your preposterous supposition.'

'I'm guessing which one it might be. I still can't ask you which way you'd vote. Nor Hillyard.'

'But you've guessed how it might go. So could the Bakerloo. You asked me not to tell them if a deadlock developed, and now if I can avoid it decently I won't. But you've guessed. So can they. *And so could who you're thinking of.* He might even find out, for he has very good sources . . . international. . . . May I ask what you're going to do?'

'I wish I could answer simply. One minimizes risks—it's an axiom of my trade. We know we can't always avoid them.'

Lord Laver said softly: 'No doubt you insure them though?'

'We do our best.'

The Lord Lavers, both of them, rose decidedly. The English Lord Laver was a little irascible; he said: 'We've been talking rubbish. If you were less than what you are I'd be telling you you read too many paperbacks.' But the other Lord Laver smiled a Mediterranean smile. This one, still softly, said: 'So you insure your risks? Please do it thoroughly. Good luck to you.'

6

AT half-past nine next morning Robert Mortimer went straight to Russell's room. He clicked his almost imperceptible click, but Russell received him easily. 'You got my message, I see. Please sit down.'

Mortimer did so, and for a moment Russell doodled; then he said reflectively: 'This matter of Bonavias . . . and Radarmic which Bonavias control or could. Also of Baker and Looe who would like to control Bonavias. Also of an organization —a single man if you prefer it—who we believe is the power behind Baker and Looe. You follow the . . . the chain of command?'

'I do, sir.'

'And you saw the evening paper yesterday?'

'Yes, sir. I thought that perhaps. . . .'

But Russell was away at an apparent tangent. 'It's an unusual problem, though. I said that before. For the last few years we've had our eyes on a single and identifiable enemy. The thing has been almost routine, a sort of drill. Given a scientist of the calibre of Jim Anstey, one with something big in the offing, and we could have done our duty almost in our sleep. With the remarkable protection which a certain department of state is able to give its protégés we might have been unsuccessful again, but the buttons would have been there to press. Neatly labelled, familiar buttons, all in a comfortable row. But now we don't have any. To begin with Anstey almost certainly isn't traitor material, and moreover he isn't some civil servant-scientist working in a government establishment, but a free-lance partner in an ordinary commercial firm. Patents are involved and processes—know-how, I dare say—rather than what are formally state secrets. It's possible that any advantages which Radarmic can give us in

its own strange field will only be temporary advantages, but they're still important to us, particularly commercially. What Anstey has given Radarmic our enemies may later steal, but we've no line on that, or not for the moment. What we're concerned with now is that our friends don't *jump* it. Our friends and our alleged friends.' Russell shrugged. 'At least,' he concluded, 'that's how I see it at present. And you?'

'Just the same.'

'Which returns us to our friends. And our alleged friends. To Steiffer in particular.'

'Who we have reason to believe is the power behind Baker and Looe, who are anxious for control of Bonavias, who—'

Russell waved a hand. 'Quite so. Back round the circle again. Back to Steiffer. But eliminate Baker and Looe, eliminate Bonavias, and what you would be left with would be Steiffer controlling Radarmic. Which would gravely upset our masters.'

'I don't blame our masters.'

'Nor do I. I reported to them as I told you—that Steiffer had met Sabin Scott—and I've an engagement tomorrow as it happens. With a very eminent person.'

'I can see they'd take it seriously.'

'They do. Put at its very lowest, radar and electronics aren't fields in which to lose a major commercial advantage to a foreign group.'

'You think Steiffer is thinking commercially—only commercially?'

'I do not,' Russell said.

'Then that must mean he knows something—something about Radarmic. Something that Bonavias do not.'

Russell said bleakly: 'That wouldn't surprise me.'

'You grade him that high?'

'Unquestionably. The Steiffers have survived against the efforts of three major Powers to break them. That isn't done without intelligence in both senses. And both of the best.'

'And Baker and Looe?'

'Are a bank like another. But also they are Sabin Scott. I've heard gossip about the Bakerloo but I have thoughts about Sabin Scott. Private ideas.'

Mortimer said slowly: 'Then what do we do?'

'I was coming to that. My information—call it my informed guess—is that the Bakerloo won't get Bonavias. Or not just yet.'

'Then we needn't do anything?'

'I didn't say that. My informed guess is that the shareholders of Bonavias, who with one exception are in effect the board, will deadlock on any offer which the Bakerloo may make them. *Any* offer.'

'So...?'

'So it's our duty to preserve the deadlock. To preserve those who cause it.' Russell put on 'preserve' a faint, a professional emphasis.

Robert Mortimer considered again. Finally, more deliberately than ever, he said: 'If we were talking of our usual enemy I'd understand you. But this is the City, these are bankers. . . .'

Russell said coolly: 'Last night a banker was telling me just that. With elegant variations.'

'If you really think it's necessary.'

'I think it's *insurance*. Baker and Looe are one thing, Steiffer quite another. Walter Hillyard is the one to keep an eye on. Nothing overt, of course—that will make it harder, and so will our ignorance. If this were our usual enemy, well, we know most of his agents; we've an enormous filing system stuffed with his *potential* agents; and it isn't that easy for one of his nationals to slip into this country unnoticed. But Steiffer. . . .' Russell shook his handsome head. 'The police of Steiffer's country, the security people in particular, are very unlikely to help us against Steiffer. They're sensible men with their livings to earn—families.' Russell smiled dourly. 'A creature of Steiffer's could come ashore at Dover on an ordinary passport, no questions asked.'

'Then what do you want me to do?'

'Very little, really. I think it comes to this: we can hardly prevent some madman—dedicated they call them nowadays—we can't stop some madman shooting Hillyard in St. James's Street, but we should be able to prevent him putting himself in any unusual position which might tempt professional violence. It shouldn't be too difficult, since he leads an exemplary life. He doesn't go to night clubs and he isn't a queer; if he has criminal contacts I've never heard of them. He comes straight up to London in his car, lunches mostly at the office, and then goes straight home again. An occasional dinner in impeccably boring company. Gardening at week-ends. It comes in practice to finding out in advance if he diverges from that and, if he does, having somebody handy around. It doesn't sound exciting: there's little chance for hero stuff. Which means a very good man indeed —your best.' Russell lit his pipe. 'That's an instruction,' he said pleasantly, 'however absurd. Got it clear?'

'Yes, sir, perfectly clear.'

7

WALTER HILLYARD looked at the letters by his bedside when he woke next morning. He put on one side those which looked business or, worse, official, since he could read them on the drive to London, but there were half a dozen which seemed private, and on these he began. The third gave him a sensation which he immediately recognized and as immediate hated. For it was apprehension—fear, he thought grimly, if you didn't mind facing words. No man in middle age could open with indifference an unexpected letter from his doctor. He poured himself tea deliberately before he returned to it. Then he read on, reassurance returning.

My dear Hillyard,

Doctors don't write to their patients for nothing, so let me tell you at once that there is precious little wrong with you. Specifically, you haven't got what laymen call an incurable disease, or if you have I haven't spotted it. You haven't got T.B. You haven't even got anything as fashionable as a stomach ulcer, and if you go on living as sensibly as you do you never will. But you have got a touch of diabetes—nothing to lose sleep about, but it's there.

Let me explain. When I looked at your water the last time I checked you there was sugar in it, and that means normally only one thing. Not a serious thing, or not with you. But you must watch that sugar. That's about all it comes to in your case.

You will probably tell me that you don't eat sugar anyway, and in a patient's sense I believe you. You've a very good figure still, and I can see that you don't eat sweet things in the ordinary meaning. But medically

speaking you almost certainly take in much more sugar than you realize. What did you drink before dinner last night? A couple of gins? And what did you eat for dessert? Fruit? Or even an ice cream? That's quite a lot of sugar, you know. I'll send you a diet sheet, but it needn't alarm you. It's really no more than a statement of the sugar content of various common foods and drinks. There isn't a great hurry about it.

And, since I'm not an expert on diabetes, I'd like you to see Clarkson. He's not one of those knighted humbugs in a place which professional etiquette prevents my naming. I should describe him as a clinician rather than as a specialist. In any case he's very good indeed, a genuine expert. I should add that it's perfectly natural that I should want a second opinion—not just medical passing the buck. I'm not an expert myself but a general practitioner. Of a sort.

I've made an appointment for you in ten days time. That's the earliest I could get you, since Clarkson's a busy man. You should find that reassuring if you think about it. I don't know myself how many men in a hundred are technically diabetics, but I do know that there are thousands of men and women who live, apart from their diet and a regular check-up, pretty well normal lives with what my profession calls diabetes. It's a word like another.

But go and see Clarkson. He won't tell you much himself, but he'll write everything to me.

With kind regards to your wife,

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Macrae.

Walter Hillyard read this letter a second time. He approved its meticulous drafting: it had been intended to minimize apprehension and it had done so. He wasn't, now, afraid. But something it had left, and Walter couldn't put his finger on it. Finally he decided that it was irritation. He was sick—there was no ducking that—and sickness was

something he'd never considered; he'd taken some pains to avoid it, and successfully. And now this infernal thing, this nuisance, that was it. . . .

But they could probably clear it up. He had heard of insulin: that was what they gave to diabetics. But, as he shaved, he saw that he was frowning. . . . Insulin—he hadn't heard it cured you. Insulin was what you took or died. Wretched creatures, half human, slaves, taking their two, sometimes three, shots a day. . . .

Of course that was absurd. Macrae hadn't been alarming and Macrae was honest; he was much too good a doctor to be otherwise. Macrae wanted him to see this Clarkson and naturally he'd do so. Meanwhile he wouldn't think of it.

He smiled a little wryly, correcting himself. Meanwhile he'd try not to think of it.

He finished his tea and walked downstairs. George Mears was holding the door of the Rolls, and on an impulse Walter took it from him. He shut it firmly, climbing into the seat beside the driver. He didn't wish to talk, but he would be glad of George Mears beside him. He had a trying day before him. The bloody Bakerloo, making a formal offer, today perhaps.

If Laver had been right he indeed had a day before him. And it hadn't started well: that sort of day never did. A day in the City, its shams, its pretensions. . . .

He cursed it softly.

They were onto the bypass when he saw them, four very shabby people thumbing the Rolls unhopefully. Walter told George Mears to stop, and Mears, expressionless, did so. Walter walked back to the little group. They'd been marching, it seemed, protesting at something. There were two men, two girls. The men had clumsy rucksacks, foolish beards; the women, slightly but inescapably, smelt. They began to explain but Walter politely stopped them. He walked with them to the waiting car, putting the rucksacks in the boot. In its maw they looked uncomfortable and lost. He opened the door and handed the four marchers in. Their chatter had died suddenly.

Walter climbed back beside George Mears and the Rolls moved away again. Mears began to laugh quietly. He was a very good driver and he changed down one to do so. He was also a kindly man, but he couldn't quite hide his amusement. Walter was smiling too. He passed his cigarette case through the sliding partition. One of the girls thanked him.

Presently Mears said: 'Where shall I drop them?'

'We're not going to drop them. I heard something about Fulham, North Ealing. . . .'

'I'm to take you to the office? You in front? All of you? All through the City?'

'Yes, please.'

'Then take them to their homes?'

'Yes please. And all through the City again.'

George Mears began to laugh again but Walter was serious. Marchers, he was thinking—protesters. Protesting against something they quite likely knew little about. But a gesture, a thumb to nose, a snook. . . .

This morning he'd cock one too.

The board meeting at Bonavias had been fixed for half-past four. It was a somewhat formal title for a very informal affair. The dining table had been cleared but they did not sit at it; it had been pushed to one side, and they sat in arm-chairs round a pleasantly Victorian fireplace. There were the three directors, Hillyard, Lord Laver and Sir Thomas Gutteridge and, since by law there had to be one, a dim, quiet secretary. The managers were present too—Mr. Acceptances, Mr. Import-Export and Mr. Investments. There was no Mr. Hire-Purchase-Finance. If there had been, Walter thought grimly, they probably wouldn't have been meeting there today, for the financing of hire-purchase was often extremely profitable. It was something new, and he had tried to get a foothold but had failed. He had tried within the limits of what he considered decency. He was aware that the proviso was itself a failure. . . . As he had failed and others had not. Baker and Looe, for example.

Damn Baker and Looe.

The three managers sat in their armchairs, upright and attentive, exuding an aura of competence and discretion nicely blended. They were worried men and had been for some years; they had families and commitments, and all were over forty. It was something, still, to be a manager in Bonavias, but it was no use pretending that prestige was everything. Not today, not with people like Baker and Looe coming up. The managers were well paid men, but the future. . . .

They had worried about it, and this morning's letter which Lord Laver had shown them they had recognized at once as crisis. They sat very quietly, waiting.

Lord Laver addressed them first. 'You've all seen that letter from the Bakerloo. I asked you to attend because you're just as much part of the house as we are.' The managers emitted a smooth murmur of appreciation, and Lord Laver went on. 'I asked you, too, because we should be grateful for your advice. But I should like that advice to be quite free advice, quite unaffected by any personal considerations. So let me tell you at once that any arrangement which we might consider with Baker and Looe would be dependant upon their finding comparable positions for yourselves.' Lord Laver smiled suddenly. 'In less pompous language,' he said, 'no jobs for the boys, no deal.'

'Thank you very much, sir.' They had spoken together.

'Very well then, you can advise us freely. Now please do so.'

Mr. Import-Export and Mr. Investment looked at Mr. Acceptances. Mr. Acceptances was the senior. He gave a little nod, then said: 'We think it's a very good offer.'

'You've examined it in detail? You've had time?'

'We've examined it very carefully. Even allowing for the freehold of this building, which is certainly very valuable, we're inclined to think that the offer is well above the actuarial value of the assets.'

'How much above?'

'We should say about twenty per cent.'

Lord Laver asked thoughtfully: 'The assets of this house? The tangible assets?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And the goodwill? The business as a business? As a going concern?'

There was a considerable, an uncomfortable silence before Lord Laver said: 'Quite.' He offered cigarettes and Mr. Acceptances was first with a match. He knew Lord Laver detested lighters. Lord Laver smoked most of his cigarette before he added: 'Well, there it is. We take it your advice is to accept?'

'We might try for more, of course.'

'I don't think we'll do that; I don't think we can.' Lord Laver threw his cigarette into the fireplace. 'To be candid with you, we're not in agreement. That is in confidence, naturally, but we're not in agreement. As directors, that is, for we've already discussed it between ourselves. And ultimately as shareholders. Any vote would be, er, nugatory.'

The managers were still again. Finally Mr. Acceptances said: 'If I may ask . . . ?'

'Certainly.'

'Do we take it that if this proposal went to the vote of the holders of the equity there would be no majority for it?'

'Yes, as it stands. We'll consider your advice—I didn't ask you here for nothing. We'll discuss it again as shareholders. But I can make you no promises.'

Mr. Acceptances rose and the others with him; he allowed himself the faintest of shrugs. 'In that case. . . .' His voice died unhappily. 'I thank you—we thank you—for your consideration, sir.'

The managers went away and Lord Laver to the side-board. By contemporary standards he wasn't a very good banker, but he had very unmodern virtues. Recrimination was unknown to him. He poured drinks and offered them; he began to talk about the Derby.

Walter bought his evening paper as he walked into the courtyard. The same man had been selling him one for ten years and more, but this evening it was a stranger. Walter said pleasantly: 'Hullo. Bought the pitch?'

'No, sir, just keeping it warm.'

Something about the voice arrested him. It wasn't an educated voice but nor was it quite uneducated. The man had said sir very easily, neither grudging the courtesy nor consciously obsequious. He seemed to be used to saying sir. Walter Hillyard looked at him. He had clear dark eyes under very straight eyebrows, a well-shaped, full, decided mouth. He didn't look wholly English. His clothes were dirty but had once been good. He's seen better days, Walter thought. On an impulse he asked: 'Where's Charlie then?'

'Charlie is sick, sir.' There was the faintest accent.

'For long?'

'I hope not, sir.'

'You're a pal of his, of course?'

'Of course, sir.'

Walter was curious but also at a loss. He would have liked to know more, to have offered help perhaps, for Charlie had become a small but recognized part of his existence. But this new man wasn't communicative and he himself couldn't stand chattering all evening. Another customer came up, and the new man made a muddle of his change. Walter walked across to the Rolls, climbing in beside George Mears again. Mears too was a part of his life and not, he had realized, a small one. George Mears was around and that was important; George Mears was genuine. You could sit beside him, quietly relaxing, certain of understanding; you could drink with him, five evenings in seven, in the Lion. They were often more rewarding than the others.

But this evening Walter said reluctantly: 'We're pretty late—a meeting, you know. No Lion, I'm afraid.'

'Very good, sir.'

George Mears showed no disappointment, and in fact he had none to hide. He didn't want to drink, or not with Hillyard; he wanted to think, and alone. He wasn't a good

actor and his master was observant. Mears would give something away before he'd had time to get used to the idea, and that would be fatal. Walter Hillyard mustn't know. That was essential, that had been impressed on Mears.

By that Major Robert Mortimer. He had walked into the bar, quite cool, hailing George Mears as though the years since the war hadn't slipped past them. Mears had always liked him—he thought him the best sort of regimental officer—and he had listened with respect as the pint tankards emptied leisurely. With astonishment but respect. The major, it seemed, worked in something called security. There was no secret about that. What was secret was that Walter Hillyard was in trouble—trouble and perhaps real danger. The major had known a surprising amount; he had known what was obvious, that Mears worked for Hillyard, but he knew much else as well . . . George Mears was a valet-chauffeur, but wasn't he rather a special sort of chauffeur? Didn't have have, well, privileges, really? And didn't privileges carry responsibilities? That was a C.O's pep talk, dreadful Army bull, but it happened to be true outside it.

Robert Mortimer had ordered more beer, and Mears had considered. Finally he said: 'I'm no spy.'

'I know you're not. Actually I'm stiff with spies.'

'And you was talking about danger. I wouldn't be no good at that no more. I'm forty-six—same age as Mr. Hillyard. I've never fired a pistol in my life. A rifle now—I wasn't a bad shot.'

'You were an excellent shot.'

'But I can't walk around with a rifle and sword.'

They had been Riflemen.

Mortimer said soothingly; 'I wasn't asking you to carry arms at all. I've plenty of those chaps too.'

But Mears was stubborn. 'He's a decent master and a decent man. I . . . I like him.'

'Then won't you help him?'

Mears said something into his beer; he raised his head, adding contemptuously: 'By spying on him?'

'Not at all. I think he needs protection against the possibility of violence. I put it no higher than possibility, and maybe even that is stretching it. I don't believe anyone is going to knife him in broad daylight, but I want to know if he does anything out of the ordinary. Then I reckon to look after it myself.'

George Mears thought this over, but he still wasn't satisfied. 'What sort of thing?' he asked.

'Well, going abroad, for instance. Or if the car goes in for overhaul and he has to take taxis.'

'You want to know where he *is*?'

'That's about what it comes to.'

Mears walked to the bar and bought more beer; returning he said simply: 'I owe him that.'

Yes, he thought now, driving home, he owed him that. Probably it was nonsense, but the major had never been a fool. And Mr. Hillyard did look ill: maybe it fitted somewhere. Mr. Hillyard looked strange—strained like a green one before battle and sometimes afterwards. Mears hadn't told Mortimer that; he hadn't been asked and he was never a chatterer.

He slowed the car at the little lodge, but Hillyard told him to drive on. George Mears didn't like it. Walter Hillyard had walked from the lodge to the house every evening since they had had it. Mears glanced at him covertly.

He didn't like the look of him.

Walter and Cynthia dined alone, rather later than usual. The spring evening had faded, but the curtains were undrawn still. Candles burnt motionless and beautiful silver shone. They had eaten a clear soup, grilled sole and Wensleydale, and Walter had caught himself thinking that the meal might have been chosen for a diabetic. But he had suppressed the thought disgustedly. Irony was one thing, self-pity quite another, and this was dangerously near self-pity. Nevertheless it had been an admirable, competent

meal. Cynthia was nothing if not competent. Competent housekeeper, competent mother, competent. . . .

Just the same he hadn't been able to tell her about the letter from Doctor Macrae. He had considered it but found that he could not; he couldn't tell his wife, not Cynthia, that he was ill.

Besides it was nothing, nothing at all.

Instead he began to talk business: after all she was a shareholder. She listened attentively but in the middle interrupted politely. 'I know the background—father told me. I know Bonavias isn't what it used to be.'

'Did he mention an offer?'

'To buy us out?'

'To amalgamate—merge us.'

'He hinted at it.'

'Well, it's arrived.'

She didn't seem surprised. 'Is it a good one?'

'Very, I should say.'

'What does my father think?'

He hesitated. 'I don't know that I should tell you that.'

She said calmly: 'He'd tell me if I asked him.'

This he considered, deciding that it was true. 'He's for it,' he said.

'And you?'

He looked at her in the candlelight. She was a beautiful woman still with a clear, a direct intelligence. Perhaps the two were less than complementary; perhaps the woman lost something by that lucid, pragmatic brain.

He stifled the thought, ashamed of it. 'I'm against it,' he said. 'I've enough shares to stop it.'

'But why?'

He began to explain. . . . Four generations, the boys. . . .

'The boys can find other jobs. They've brains. And if the offer is good we'd none of us be poor.'

'No, we shouldn't be poor.'

'Then I don't understand.'

He looked at her again. No, she didn't understand. She was quiet still but taut. He could see she was exasperated,

but he tried to explain again. 'Have you ever been to one of those country houses—broken-down noblemen, I mean, and impoverished county families? They live in the servants' quarters and let you go round for two shillings. They run dreadful tea stalls, sell even more dreadful postcards. Charabancs outside all the summer. I've never had that sort of house, but . . . ?'

'You'd do the same?' She sounded incredulous.

'I might. I think I would.'

She said with a cool emphasis: 'I wouldn't. I think they're fools. Mostly they could sell and invest. They could buy a smaller house. They could still live decently—sensibly.'

He tried again. 'It doesn't touch you then?'

'It touches me all right. I think I despise it. Who wants a millstone?'

'Sometimes they get tied to you.'

'Then cut the string. You can, you know.'

'Suppose I don't want to?'

'Oh God,' she said.

There was a miserable silence which Cynthia broke at last. 'Is that all?'

'Isn't it enough?'

'Not quite. I think there's something else.'

He couldn't help smiling. 'You're clever. Perhaps there is.'

'You must tell me,' she said simply.

'All right. . . . Do you know whom the offer comes from?'

'Does it matter?'

'To me. It's Baker and Looe.'

'I've heard of them,' she said. 'They're a business like another. Like Bonavias.'

'They've a very queer reputation.'

'But money. They want us and they can pay. And well. And if we don't accept them. . . .'

'Yes?' Walter was very quiet.

'In ten years time Bonavias will be forgotten.'

'Perhaps.' He was drinking a little wine, aware that perhaps he shouldn't be.

She rose unexpectedly. 'Walter,' she said urgently, 'Walter . . .'

He shook his head.

For a moment she hesitated, then walked quickly from the room. It was his impression that she would have liked to cry but couldn't. She wasn't the crying kind.

He sat on wretchedly. He couldn't reach her; he never had.

He awoke in the small hours, conscious of Cynthia beside him, turning towards her but not in desire. He had realized that he had been arrogant, and the arrogant man of affairs, insensitive, was something he detested. He owed her an apology, for he'd taken her for granted. After all she had ten per cent: his cool assumption that it was his own to vote with must have been maddening. It was not. Ten from thirty was twenty, and ten on to Laver's thirty. . . .

Or she could simply abstain.

Not that she would do it. Her holding had come from her father, but it had come in a marriage settlement, and to Cynthia marriage was something serious, a partnership. She wouldn't ditch a partner, but the partner who simply assumed it, took her blandly for granted. . . .

He'd been an insensitive fool; he'd blundered. Like Capri again, he thought.

He put out his hand but dropped it. She was sleeping, breathing deeply. It would be inconsiderate to wake her.

He rolled on his other side. Cynthia had ten per cent; she wouldn't pull him down.

But Cynthia could be important to him. If they really went after him, really went after him. . . .

8

SABIN SCOTT was driving to Dover. He had been sent for peremptorily, but again had obeyed without question. He had been given no reason for the summons but he wasn't disturbed by it. The offer to Bonavias was in, and a very good offer it was. He couldn't expect an answer by return of post, but he didn't doubt Bonavias would accept it. Bonavias were on the slide; they'd be fools to turn it down. He despised what they stood for but he didn't believe them fools.

He began to hum softly in his slightly pretentious car. Things were going his way, the way he really wanted. Once he had thought differently; once he had thought that money, a lot of it, say half a million, would be ample—ample to expunge his youth and childhood, the things he hadn't had, the other children he had envied, hated, the gross humiliations of a provincial poverty. Poor whites, they'd been, he thought. Hell then, he'd show them all. And hell, he had shown them.

It had been a surprise at first when the drug hadn't bitten. . . . A fine little house in London though he said it, a cottage in Berkshire; this splendid car which he knew he drove splendidly; a manservant, women, an assured position—they none of them assuaged him. The substitutes were no surrogate. He wasn't interested in psychiatry, and words like over-compensation would have struck him as mumbo-jumbo. He knew a shorter one, much shorter, and he wouldn't have flinched from it.

Damn them, the whole set-up was an insult—privilege, education, leisure. One sort of man reacted politically, but Scott had no time for him. The other saw it personally: it was a personal wound to be stanchéd. . . . Just look at a type

like Hillyard. A pale man, Scott thought him, too old in blood, too casual, making it all look easy. But when he fought he could mostly choose the weapons and they wouldn't be yours. Naturally he'd beat you.

As indeed he had done, and more than once. Sabin Scott resented the defeats but the manner of them much more. The telephone calmly picked up, the William-Charlie-Dick, the Old Boy network; the lunches at Bratt's, late into a leisurely afternoon, the dozen allusive words at a week-end's golf. That was how they ran it and it wasn't good enough. The power to fix, the power to admit. And the power to exclude, to freeze. The Divine Right of Walter Hillyard, Walter Hillyard and friends, but especially Walter Hillyard.

Naturally he sometimes beat you, and bitterly unfairly. Well, he wasn't going to now. Sabin Scott smiled grimly. Steiffer wanted Bonavias—it was irrelevant why—and Steiffer was power, a power within a Power. His government listened to Steiffer as an equal. Steiffer was an empire, international and impersonal. Steiffer was huge reserves of hard, hard currency in a country which still had more men than jobs for them. Steiffer owed no loyalties, only scores to be settled. That made a pair of them.

By God, he'd show them—Hillyard, Bonavias, the whole smiling pack of them.

He began to consider his instructions again for they had puzzled him. He was to meet Steiffer as before, and he was to bring with him a pad of thin paper and two sharp pencils. *Two* sharp pencils. Sabin Scott, grinning, relaxed. That was typical Steiffer staffwork. He was to take some note, he supposed, and Steiffer wouldn't be amused if he kept him waiting while he sharpened pencils.

A formidable man, an ally beyond price.

Scott walked up the gangway into the cabin he had been told. Steiffer didn't rise. Instead he said: 'Good afternoon. Sit down. Don't speak again.' He took a pad of paper from his briefcase, writing on it quickly. The message he handed to Scott.

This cabin has been tapped. Be silent. Communicate in writing.

Sabin Scott nodded quickly and Steiffer wrote again.

The board of Bonavias cannot agree about our offer. Enzio Bonavia has 40% but is unlikely to use it. Lord Laver holds 30% and would accept. Hillyard controls another 30% and will not.

Sabin Scott wrote in answer:

How do you know this?

Mind your own business.

Sabin Scott was silent, waiting. The next note said simply:

The deadlock must be resolved.

But how?

I would not entrust you with that. In that kind of thing you're quite inexpert.

Sabin Scott began to scribble furiously; he wrote something about England, a law-abiding people, the police. Steiffer mustn't imagine that England was the same as . . .

But Steiffer had lost patience. He reached for the unfinished note, reading it frowning:

Print in capitals. In emotion your handwriting deteriorates.

Scott gave it up, waiting again.

I shall make my own arrangements through my own agents. But you should know that they exist. Knowing they exist you will be able to avoid indiscretions.

Sabin Scott looked at Steiffer. That was correct, he was thinking, even wise; it was typical Steiffer staffwork since, left in ignorance, he could easily have blundered. But there was something else and it disturbed him. Steiffer's pig eyes glittered with an unmistakable malice. There was worry about, or soon there would be, and Steiffer was passing him his share of it. He wouldn't let you off anything; he never did.

Scott shrugged uneasily, awaiting another note. When it came it said only:

Understood?

UNDERSTOOD.

Steiffer rose decidedly. He collected the pieces of paper, arranging them in order, checking them. When he was satisfied he opened his suitcase, producing a metal bowl. He

put the papers into it and fired them, watching them burn, seeing that nothing was left. The ash he stirred carefully into the finest powder. He walked into the lavatory.

Sabin Scott sat on; Sabin Scott was scared.

Presently Steiffer returned. 'Good evening again.' For the first time he smiled. 'If you wish to take leave you may. You know where you can contact me.'

'Good afternoon,' Scott said. He was wishing his voice were steadier.

He clattered from the cabin.

9

CHARLES RUSSELL was motoring to the country to keep his appointment with the Prime Minister. But not to Chequers. The Prime Minister loathed Chequers, and Russell, who had visited that deadly mausoleum under a previous incumbent, agreed with him. Instead he drove through the modest gateway of the Prime Minister's own home, up the drive, well kept but not immaculate, admiring the fine file of chestnut trees, the rhododendrons much less. The house itself was pleasantly nondescript, but solid and bigger than it looked. The Prime Minister didn't think of himself as rich, but he wasn't dependant on his salary and notoriously inadequate allowances. He had run a prosperous business and was proud of it; he could if he wished return. He found that very useful with colleagues who mostly could not.

His wife received Russell over the agreeable ritual of tea, and presently the Prime Minister appeared from the garden. He looked hot and happy, and with Russell he didn't bother to be political; he didn't bother with his warmest smile. He began at once to deprecate what it was common knowledge he was good at. 'Of course,' he said, 'I'm not really a gardener. My wife is the gardener. I'm not even an under-gardener. I'm a gardener's labourer.'

His wife contrived a sharp ironical sound with a silver teaspoon and some excellent china, and the Prime Minister chuckled. It was evident that they were on very good terms. They were relaxed; they amused each other. The Prime Minister wasn't in politics because his private life was insupportable. Since plenty of others were, that again was useful to him.

When they had finished tea they went into the study. There were a great many books in beautiful, break-front

bookcases, leather chairs, a round table, and a solid desk. Views of Venice on the walls, the frames rather better than the painting, the head of a tiger looking, in Sussex, alien and astonished. The Prime Minister sat at the desk and Russell in an armchair next to it. The Prime Minister said: 'I've read your report.' But it wasn't visible: on the contrary there wasn't a paper in sight, for the Prime Minister was good with paper. What he must read he kept to a rigid minimum, and that he read carefully. Then he sent it away. He wasn't a civil servant; he didn't need a pile of dog-eared dossiers to impress. He said again: 'I read your note.'

Russell nodded.

'Of course this is rather a rum one, since what worries us is basically a rumour. Bonavias is a British concern and so, ostensibly, is Baker and Looe. On the face of it we shouldn't be worrying if Baker and Looe swallows Bonavias and with it whatever strings Bonavias have on Radarmic. Nevertheless we *are* worrying; we're worrying because if Baker and Looe are really controlled by whom we think they are, Radarmic could in effect become a foreign firm. And not foreign in a sense which any of us could feel happy with.'

'That's about it at bottom.'

'I don't understand the technicalities—of Radarmic, I mean—but I know that radar and electronics run rocketry neck and neck. Rockets are something developed, or more likely made a mess of, in government establishments. They haven't any commercial value, and if you need the things the taxpayer must pay for them. But electronics are a perfectly respectable commercial proposition, and it was always quite possible that a commercial firm would stumble on something revolutionary. Which I gather is exactly what has happened. As I say, I don't understand the details but' —the Prime Minister moved his hands—'if you could *bend* the thing, somehow get over the unfortunate fact that the earth is round, even go some way towards it....'

'You'd have something,' Russell said.

'Something indeed. So let's keep it at the commercial level. You'd have something valuable, something to use and

sell. Its protection in that part of the world where a British patent isn't sancrosanct would be another problem—one for you, my friend, and I don't doubt familiar—but leaving that aspect aside, we'd be left with a solid commercial advantage, at least for a time. We could manufacture it ourselves, grant licences. . . .' The Prime Minister filled a pipe. 'Are you with me so far?'

'Of course, sir.'

'But if Radarmic went—well, went foreign. . . ?'

'It would be tiresome.'

The Prime Minister laughed. 'An understatement but effective.' He lit his pipe thoughtfully. 'Tell me,' he said, 'exactly what strings on Radarmic do Bonavias have?'

'Two hundred thousand pounds, I'm told.'

'Oh quite. I know that from what you wrote me. But presumably it's a debt like another and therefore repayable. I don't imagine that Bonavias have the legal right to keep Radarmic in their debt for ever. There's almost certainly the right to repay, at any rate in theory, though we know that isn't the real intention of either party. What both want ultimately is a public flotation.' The Prime Minister stopped suddenly. 'But you were going to ask me something?'

'No, sir.'

The Prime Minister looked mildly disappointed. He had a logical mind uncomplicated by the intellectual's deference to dialectic for its own sake, and he was a fluent, convincing speaker. But he liked the helpful question; he liked it fed to him. 'I thought you might be going to ask me why we're fussing about Bonavias and Baker and Looe when the essential is the relationship between Bonavias and Radarmic. You tell me that that relationship is one of two hundred thousand pounds. But remove it, repay the debt and. . . ?'

Russell asked slowly: 'And you wouldn't mind seeing Bonavias go?'

'That's an exaggeration for a change, but I can see you follow me.'

'I'm not too sure. Are you suggesting a semi-official loan to Radarmic so that they could pay off Bonavias?'

'Not quite. I don't say we couldn't do it. Not with Treasury money, naturally—not with public moneys in the ordinary sense. There's an elaborate machine called Exchequer and Audit which is very efficient at stopping an official with a sensible idea putting it into practice, though it doesn't prevent some committee earning perhaps ten thousand a year between them squandering millions strictly within the rules. So I couldn't use public moneys. But you're an experienced man, Russell; I won't insult you by pretending that a Prime Minister is quite resourceless.'

'No doubt, sir.'

'So I'll tell you why I'm not going to offer Radarmic two hundred thousand from a source unspecified. I don't think they'd accept it. Why should they? What they want is an issue—it's the only real way of capitalizing their own progress and build-up. They haven't a *motive* to pay off Bonavias.'

'Then we could tell Bonavias the whole story. We could ask them to let go.'

'Before the Ministry has got those contracts? Before Radarmic is really ready? Before the whole thing's sewn up?'

'It'd be a risk.'

'It would indeed, and something worse. I don't think it would be fair. In effect we'd be taking business from them; we'd be inhibiting a deal, and we'd be paying nothing for it. We'd be talking about the public interest, looking solemn, asking a favour. . . . I don't like that. I once made an honest living before I was Prime Minister. I wouldn't mind wrecking Bonavias if I had to, but I stick at being beholden to them.'

'Then it seems to be stalemate, sir.'

'Not quite again.' The Prime Minister rang a bell. A tray appeared and, when the maid had gone, the Prime Minister asked unexpectedly: 'Just how cut-throat are the merchant banks? I mean with each other.'

'I honestly don't know. Pretty savage, I dare say.'

'Would one of the others take on Radarmic? Lend them two hundred thousand to pay off Bonavias and float them later themselves?'

Russell rubbed his chin. 'I can't be sure. It may be a savage business, but it's a club of a sort too. They none of them love the Bakerloo—they've most of them reason not to; they might jump at a chance to ditch Baker and Looe, but what you suggest would ditch Bonavias. Between Baker and Looe and Bonavias I think they'd come down for Bonavias.'

The Prime Minister said softly: 'Lohmeyers—they might do it. Lohmeyers can still do most things. It wouldn't be the first time Lohmeyers had obliged a British government.'

'I remember.' Russell smiled. 'It was a little before my time, but I remember.... Of course it would finish Bonavias.'

'If we're right in thinking that Steiffer is behind Baker and Looe, Bonavias is finished anyway. Sooner or later.' The Prime Minister stared at the window. In the garden it wasn't quite dark and it was evident he wished to be there. He rose rather suddenly. 'Lohmeyers,' he said again. 'It's well worth thinking of.' He smiled a little wryly. 'Running a country.... It can be a rough game sometimes.'

Charles Russell drove back from Sussex thoughtfully, parking his car in Ryder Street, reflecting that there were advantages in being known to the police. He walked round the corner to his club.

He had often privately laughed at Bratt's, for it was a decidedly uppity place. To begin with it had no bar: gentlemen didn't drink at bars but were served, in armchairs, by antiquated waiters. It hadn't been so long ago that they had given you your change in a washleather bag, for gentlemen didn't handle silver. And it didn't chain the nailfiles in the loo. That cost the committee a good deal of money annually. Not that the members stole them, or not very often, but they put them in their pockets. Still, that was better than chaining chattels. Three tenners a year on nailfiles—that was tolerable. But chains on the nailfiles—my dear sir, not in Bratt's.

The subscription was rather high.

Russell was waiting in the smoking-room for the whisky

he had ordered when Lord Laver slipped into the chair beside him. Lord Laver said amiably: 'Have you heard of a drink called Thirty-Thirty?'

'Never. Are you offering me one?'

'By no means. It's what they give you at literary cocktail parties. Thirty per cent gin, thirty per cent water.'

'And the other forty per cent?'

'Isn't there. Doesn't function.'

Russell said softly: 'So it did break like that?'

'Yes. I thought I ought to tell you.'

'I'm more than obliged.' Russell hesitated, then asked finally: 'Have you told anyone else?'

'After our last discussion—no. Categorically no. They could guess though, or perhaps do better.'

'Thank you,' Russell said.

A dreadful waiter shuffled up. 'Drink?' Russell asked.

'Yes, please. Large whisky.'

Russell gave the order.

'Thanks,' Laver said. 'Not that I haven't earned it.'

Russell garaged his car, walking on to his flat. Robert Mortimer was sitting with the porter, reading an evening newspaper, drinking tea. He was a man at home in many companies. They went upstairs unhurriedly and Russell found brandy. Mortimer, he decided, looked as though he needed one and, as he started to tell his story, Russell gave him another. He sounded, now, as though he had earned it.

For Major Mortimer was disappointed. His excellent sources had told him that Steiffer was coming to Dover again, and another not less competent machine had this time tapped his cabin. And it seemed that machinery even more sensitive had succeeded in warning Steiffer. The tap had caught a couple of greetings and a final exchange of farewells. What else had passed must have passed in writing. Major Mortimer was indignant.

Russell was sympathetic, generous with the brandy, but

he wasn't entirely surprised. When Mortimer had finished he said: 'I don't know that it matters much.'

'I'd have given an eye to have heard what they said.'

'But I think we can deduce it. I know now—I *know*—that one director of Bonavias is against any merger with the Bakerloo and holds enough of the equity to force a deadlock. I can do better than guess which it is.'

'And with Steiffer coming over here, talking to Sabin Scott. . . .'

Russell said reflectively: 'I spoke once before of preserving the deadlock—preserving the man who causes it. I dare say it's time for a stronger word.' He drank some brandy deliberately. 'Let us now say protect.'

'I took you up on "preserve", of course. I was lucky. I served with Hillyard's chauffeur in the war, so I got hold of him quietly. I thought it would be enough for the moment if we knew if Hillyard did anything unusual. If he went on a holiday, or took a trip abroad.'

'And now you think otherwise?'

'I don't know what to think. The Bakerloo is one thing, Steiffer quite another. You said so yourself.'

'Precisely. . . . You think we should warn Hillyard?'

Robert Mortimer shrugged. 'Of what?' he asked. 'It's the inevitable problem of our trade: people don't believe you, and mostly I don't blame them. . . . So we tell Walter Hillyard that the Bakerloo is Steiffer; we tell him that Steiffer's been coming here, talking in secret to Sabin Scott. Quite a jump, don't you think? to telling him that Steiffer might kill him to break a deadlock on an offer to amalgamate. This is England, the City of London to boot. Are we going to show him the Steiffer file? Would he believe it if we did?'

'He might; he's intelligent.'

'But if he did, does it help us? Have you ever warned a middle-aged City banker that a foreign industrialist may be intending violence? *May*, I repeat. We think it's a possible starter or we shouldn't be discussing it, but it's our business to think these things. We haven't a shred of proof. And suppose we convinced him, somehow put it over, where's

the advantage? To us, I mean.' Mortimer was fluent now, talking of something he understood. 'What could he do for himself that we can't do better for him? Assuming, that is, that we didn't merely scare him, which would make the job still more difficult.'

'You've an argument.'

'One we've had before. This protection problem isn't a new one.'

'How do you usually solve it?'

'We don't solve it usually—it depends on the case. Sometimes we tell them—the young ones, the ones who might play. But even that's a risk, since sometimes they play too well. Sometimes they buy themselves guns, even start firing them. I remember....'

'So do I,' Russell said.

'Quite the wrong man as it happened. Hellish awkward.'

'Very awkward indeed. And Hillyard isn't young.' Russell considered. 'The police . . .' he began.

'*Pace* what you read about us, I don't despise the police. Police protection can be very efficient, but one thing's essential to it: you have to tell them everything—an intelligible story about an intelligible risk. Such and such a time at such and such a place. The police can look after that and do, but it's just what we can't tell them. The bobby on the beat is useless, and the rest we can do better ourselves, the tagging about, I mean, the watching, the *protection*.'

'I hope so,' Russell said. 'We've had our failures.'

'Of course if you feel, sir. . . .'

'I do not feel; I'm not paid to feel.' Russell considered again intently. 'All right,' he said. 'There's a net, I suppose, but the holes are uncomfortably large.' His face was grim. 'Watch them, won't you?'

IO

WALTER HILLYARD was keeping his appointment with Doctor Clarkson. He was impressed with him, but he would also have admitted to an emotion less agreeable. Doctor Clarkson was very quiet, and Walter remembered that Macrae had called him a clinician. He was courteous and, in his remote way, sympathetic, but he was as detached as a priest in his box. Nothing surprised him. He had seen it, he had heard it all before.

He examined Walter conscientiously, then asked him to sit down. In his pleasant quiet voice he said: 'There are one or two things which only you can tell me.'

'I will if I can.'

'Your general health, for instance. Have you noticed any deterioration?'

'Nothing you could use that word for.'

'Let me put it another way. You're forty-six, I see. Do you feel that you have the—well, the reserves which a healthy man could reasonably expect at forty-six?'

'I'm under some strain at this moment.' Walter hadn't intended to duck.

Doctor Clarkson said softly: 'That I can see.' He changed the subject smoothly. 'Any minor ailments?' he asked. 'More than normally? Colds, chills and so on?'

'Two frightful colds this winter. Much worse than usual—yes.'

'Hard to get rid of them?'

'A little.'

'Anything else?'

'Well, it sounds silly, but I've had a couple of boils. On my neck. I haven't had a boil since boyhood.'

'I see,' Clarkson said. 'I see.' He rose with his confessional

smile. 'I expect you know that I'm not supposed to tell you much directly. As it happens there isn't much to tell. I've tests to do and so on. When they're complete I'll write to Macrae—that's the drill.'

'Macrae will send for me?'

'Macrae will let you know.'

Doctor Clarkson showed Walter out and went at once to his laboratory. Ninety minutes later he was ringing Macrae. He asked collectedly: 'How much did you say he had?'

Doctor Macrae told him.

'I don't say you were wrong—that was some time ago. I say he's a galloper. I'll send you a full report.'

Doctor Clarkson hung up quickly. He would send in a thorough report, but he didn't want to natter. In just five minutes he had another case.

Walter drove home with George Mears, stopping as usual at the Lion. He bought two beers for Mears but a single small whisky for himself. It was something Mears noticed. He noticed too that Hillyard was quieter than usual: he seemed depressed, more than a little on edge. Mears held his peace. He had nothing to say to Hillyard and only one thing to do for him. And that he mustn't mention.

They drove home from the Lion in silence still, but Walter was slowly relaxing. He had decided that it mightn't be too bad. Self-pity was a vice and histrionics silly. Just the same, he had seen it, an hour ago, in terms of a certain drama: Walter Hillyard was in trouble. Baker and Looe were gunning for Bonavias, and that he'd never stand for. And now he was sicker than he'd imagined. That much was clear, though Clarkson hadn't said so. He hadn't needed words, for he was wholly the professional.

It had looked a considerable mess, and for a moment Walter had been tempted to wallow; but now reason swam up again, intelligence and a sharp distaste for wallowing. . . . So Baker and Looe were after him. The unnameable Baker-

loo. All right, he could block them; he was doing just that. And as for his being sick. . . .

That couldn't be argued away, for it was solid fact. Just how solid and just how serious he didn't yet know. Macrae was going to tell him and meanwhile. . . .

Meanwhile he'd have to tell Cynthia. It wasn't something he looked forward to, but inescapably he owed it her. Cynthia was his wife, and wives burdened with sick husbands had at least the right to know of it. He'd have to tell Cynthia.

He found it much easier than he had expected. They sat in candlelight again and Walter approved her new hair style. It was softer but not less elegant: she wasn't, now, quite so notably the committeewoman. Delete, he thought smiling, committee. He found himself saying: 'Cynthia, I'm afraid I'm ill.'

She didn't seem much surprised. 'You've been looking pretty awful.'

'As bad as that?'

'The last few days—as bad as that. I know you've been worried about business, this Baker and Looe thing, but. . . .'

'It isn't only that.'

'Tell me,' she said.

He did so, omitting nothing. When he had finished she rose unexpectedly; she walked round the table and took his hand; she dropped it and sat down again. 'I'm sorry,' she said simply.

A little awkwardly he said: 'I've still to see Macrae. I've still to hear the worst.'

'Or the best.'

He heard himself laugh, pleased that it sounded natural.

'Of course this makes it easier in a way.'

'What way?'

'Well, Baker and Looe, I meant. Now that you'll be retiring. . . .'

He was unaffectedly astonished; he hadn't considered that. 'Retiring?' he repeated.

She too seemed surprised. 'But why not? You're ill, but not seriously. They're very clever with diabetics nowadays.'

You could live quite a normal life, or almost, for—oh, years and years. You're forty-six, I'm thirty-nine.'

'You don't look it,' he said. He meant it.

'Well. . . .' She stared at her competent hands. 'We shouldn't be hard up . . . Jamaica, the South of France, Italy if you prefer it. I . . . I wouldn't mind knowing you, Walter.'

'You're a damned good wife,' he said.

'I'd rather be a woman.'

He considered this carefully, more than a little uncertain; at last he said: 'But if I quit Bonavias it goes.'

He heard her sigh softly. 'I haven't been very tactful. I didn't want that argument again—not the one about the pros and cons. I'm not really interested in Baker and Looe. I'm not even interested in Bonavias.'

'I am,' he said.

'I know. But need you be—now? I don't want to sound depressing, but diabetes. . . .'

He said almost sullenly: 'Baker and Looe are Baker and Looe. It's quite unthinkable.'

'Unthinkable? Have you thought?'

'Of course I have.'

'Walter, I don't think you have. What *is* Bonavias—today, I mean?' She answered her own question. 'It's the private office of the Bonavia and Hillyard families. There's a good deal of property still and it has to be managed. I dare say there's enough banking business to pay the overheads, or some of them, and the rest we should spend anyway on lawyers, accountants and brokers. It's—it's a convenience.'

'You've certainly been talking to your father.'

'Father doesn't think I'm a fool.'

'Nor do I.'

'Then Walter. . . .'

He smiled. 'You think *I'm* a fool?'

'Not a fool. I think you ought to *think*, not just say unthinkable. Bonavias aren't alone, you know. There are several in much the same boat and they've all merged with somebody else. And you know where most of our business

was—the Eastern Mediterranean. And what's that worth today?’

He said unhappily: ‘The Bakerloo. . . .’

‘You’re funny about the Bakerloo. Sabin Scott loathes you, but he’s quite, quite wrong. So are you.’

‘I didn’t know you knew him.’

‘I don’t. But I listen.’ She was looking at him now. ‘The days can be pretty long. The boys at school . . . I’ve time for listening.’

He didn’t pursue it or dare to. ‘You were talking about Sabin Scott.’

‘Who hates you—mistakenly. He sees you as a symbol, not a man. You’re privilege, nice manners, background. He’d love to pull you down.’

‘I’d guessed that too, and that’s one reason—’

‘Let me finish. I said he was wrong and he is. He thinks of you as City—a banker, an old, old privileged banker, one of the gang. He hates it.’ She sighed again. ‘And you’re not that at all.’

‘What am I then?’

But she answered obliquely. ‘Tell me, do you *like* the City? Have you been *happy* there?’

He was startled. ‘Your father asked me that.’

‘I know. I told him to.’

‘You’re both pretty shrewd,’ he said.

‘Walter, there’s nothing to hold you. If you were what he thinks you are, true blue, four square, a City gent. . . . But you’re not. In your heart you despise them all.’

‘If I do it’s a weakness.’

She said very quietly: ‘A weakness you feel you must fight?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘Walter, we’ve our lives still, some of them. . . .’

He shook his head.

But she made one more try. Not persuasion, he noticed: persuasion had failed and she wouldn’t return to it. Instead she was making a suggestion. ‘Why don’t you see old Enzio?’

‘He’d never interfere.’

'I know—I didn't mean that. But he's head of the family still in a sense that father isn't. He's eighty but he's very much all there. You might ask his advice. It wouldn't be the first time.'

He thought it over carefully; the proposal didn't attract him but he was conscious that he owed it. His uncle by marriage was certainly very much all there; they did consult him still. Besides, he was still the major shareholder.

'All right,' he said at last.

She rose, pouring coffee. He noticed that for a second she had hesitated. But only for a second. He didn't take sugar anyway.

She returned to the table with the cups, stirring her own thoughtfully; she said conversationally: 'When will you go?'

'Tomorrow.' He was decided, almost cheerful, but he mistrusted this sudden gaiety. He was slipping a decision and aware of it. Decision was something for here and now; he could take it now and ought to. Instead he was going to Naples, talking to old Enzio Bonavia. . . . Discussion, the illusion of action. . . .

Illusion or no it seemed to work.

He went quickly to the telephone, ringing the lodge. 'Mears?'

'Yes, sir?'

'I'm going down to Naples tomorrow. I'd like you, please—'

But George Mears had interrupted. 'Have you got a 'plane seat? Should I ring B.E.A., sir?'

'I'm not going by 'plane, I hate air travel. I'll buy myself onto the eleven o'clock from Victoria—it shouldn't be too difficult—and I'll bribe myself a sleeper at the Gare de Lyon, though not on the Simplon-Orient unless I have to.'

'Very good, sir. And then?'

Walter Hillyard was surprised. 'Then the day in Milan since you seem to be interested. The other sleeper down to Naples in the evening. I don't want to arrive there in the middle of the night. I don't intend to kill myself.'

'Very good, sir. And will you be wanting me to come?'

'What on earth has got into you?' Walter Hillyard didn't take Mears travelling. 'We're not taking the car, and my clothes won't be rags in a week. I can look after myself on trains. Damn it, I *like* trains.'

'I know, sir.'

'All right, then. Bring the car up at nine, please, and if you'd find time to help me pack. . . .'

'Of course, sir.'

Walter went back to the table. Cynthia was sitting quietly, and he didn't interrupt her. He would have liked to tell her that he admired her, but that wasn't the whole truth. She'd smell out the half-lie at once. The truth was a negative: he didn't regret her. But that wasn't something you told a woman. It was a compliment none the less, a real one. He had missed something with Cynthia, but that was his own fault too.

It was raining hard and George Mears was engaged with television. He did not want to leave his lodge but did so. He walked to the village telephone box, dialling three letters only. When a voice answered he said: 'One, seven-nine, six.' It was the drill they'd given him. Presently the telephone repeated the number, and Mears asked cautiously: 'Major Mortimer?'

'Speaking.'

'Mears here, sir.'

'All right.'

'He's off to Naples tomorrow, sir. Eleven o'clock from Victoria, then a taxi across Paris, I suppose. Night sleeper to Milan, but not the Simplon-Orient—I think that's what he said. The day in Milan, then a sleeper again to Naples.'

'Thanks,' Robert Mortimer said. 'Thanks very much.'

He picked up another telephone.

Walter had no difficulty at Victoria, for the first class carriages weren't crowded. He settled in a corner seat with

a book called *The Concept of Mind*. He had been trying to find time for it for longer than he could remember. He skimmed the chapters quickly, deciding that it would last him well into Switzerland and probably beyond. Then he'd read it again coming back. It looked pretty solid stuff.

He knew the journey thoroughly, for he had many times made it. It could be boring at first, but he had resources for that. There was a train from Calais which skipped Paris entirely, but who wanted to skip Paris? Besides, it wasn't an amusing train, or even particularly comfortable. The couchettes had seen better days and the restaurant car was usually indifferent. Or there was The Rhinegold, but that was a night crossing and it went through Germany. Walter didn't like Germans. But he did like travel. It was a positive, a conscious act, and he liked to feel on top of it. He had been telling George Mears the truth in saying that he liked railway trains. He was a connoisseur of them, and he had found one which pleased him.

He took a taxi across Paris to the Gare de Lyon and at once found the *chef du train*. The *chef* was desolated but the sleeper was full. He would advise Monsieur to take the Simplon-Orient. It was a good deal quicker and. . . .

Walter declined the Simplon-Orient. It went, by definition, through the Simplon, and the Simplon bored him. He produced a note case, and a small red rosette fell neatly out of it. Walter never wore it but he knew its value. The *chef* picked it up, murmuring respectfully, eyeing the note case. He was more desolated than ever: there wasn't a one-berth sleeper on the train. Of course if Monsieur was prepared to share. . . . Walter said he'd have to. The other passenger, it seemed, was English, or at least the name was. He had booked just ten minutes before.

Walter bespoke the upper berth, leaving his bag with the *chef*, walking to the restaurant. He ordered the set dinner unhesitatingly, smiling, thinking that nobody in their senses would order the set dinner at an English terminus. Come to that, nobody in their senses would eat at an English terminus at all. But you could eat much better at the Gare de Lyon

than at many more famous restaurants. And there wasn't so much fuss—not so much damned service. Fuss with a wine too young to have thrown sediment, too reliable to have corked itself. Besides, if it had you could simply send it back again. There wouldn't be fuss about that, simply apology and at once another bottle.

He looked around the restaurant. Downstairs they had tarted it up, but here it was solidly pre-war. Pre first world war. It was full but not crowded, the diners not all travellers. There were business men with women not their wives, an elderly couple eating very seriously. With his meal Walter ordered a bottle of Beaujolais, confident that here at least the label wouldn't be lying. He found that it was not. The handsome manageress came to his table, complimenting him on his French. He thanked her politely, but with private reservations, since he knew that his French wasn't in fact remarkable. He had long since decided that when foreigners told you how well you spoke their language you couldn't be speaking it so well. Otherwise why should they bother? He knew plenty of people in London, people whose accents would eternally betray them, but who would be anything but flattered if he praised their English. But in Italy it was different; in Italy nobody mentioned his Italian. He could even speak dialect. A little. Neapolitan, he thought, smiling again. How they murdered the Tuscan! But why not? Tuscan was a dialect too. There were more sorts of Italian than the language aired by arty spinsters to bored attendants in the Uffizzi.

Walter settled his bill and walked to the train in an excellent temper. The upper berth wasn't down yet, and he sat on the lower engaged with Professor Ryle. Presently a smallish man came in, wishing him good evening. He spoke very good English, but Walter knew at once that he was not. Immediately he began to fuss; he put his bag on the seat by Walter; he began to unpack it, to hang things up. It was evident that he wanted to sleep, and Walter, who did not, reluctantly called the attendant. He gave him his passport and ticket, and the attendant made the berths up. While

the little man undressed Walter walked on the platform, smoking.

When he returned the little man was in bed. Walter shrugged. The night-stool wasn't inviting, and he undressed in turn. He climbed into the upper berth, taking a travelling clock with him. He had set the alarm for a quarter to five.

That was important, for he wished to wake at Göschenen. That was part of the pleasure of this journey, the sheer sensual pleasure. He wouldn't miss it for the world. He liked to wake at Göschenen, to open the window when he could contrive that feat or, when he could not, to walk to the door of the sleeping car; he liked to savour Göschenen, the deadly, depressing German-Swiss efficiency. Then rattle-clank-bang into the St. Gotthard tunnel. He called it, to himself, the San Gottardo. Thirteen minutes it took, for he had often timed it. Then out at Airolo. Day or night it was delicious escape. And not from a mere tunnel: it was escape into another world, a vivid, Latin world, another civilization. It was an instant release to bustle and cheerful shouting. Walter didn't much care for Ticinesi, but it was certain they weren't Swiss-Germans. Then, sliding down from the mountains, the sparse greenery deepening, the dawn if you were lucky, the hurrying incontinent streams. Square little houses, and people already moving in the increasing light. The thirty second stop where nobody descended and only one man got on. It was a boy with a coffee urn. He sold it in cardboard cups, and always you bought several, for it was very good coffee. Then glimpses of lakeside villas, prosperous, Edwardian, secure. Sometimes as the train slipped down the mist came up to meet it; sometimes the struggling sun made oil of the silent lake. At Chiasso there was coffee again, even better, and amiable *doganieri* turning your English passport in their mourning finger nails, puzzled by your Italian but much too polite to question you. And finally the widening plain, down to Milano. . . .

That was where you shaved.

Walter checked his alarm. He wouldn't miss a minute

of it. He rolled over contentedly, for he slept very well on trains.

As it happened he beat his alarm, since he woke as the train stopped smoothly. He climbed from his berth in a dressing-gown, struggling with the window and, for once, winning. Yes, this was Göschenen, unmistakably Göschenen, solemn and self-conscious and by numbers. The stationmaster or perhaps his deputy was standing on the platform with another man. Both were in uniform at well past midnight. The lighting was very bright. The stationmaster signed a form and the other man took it. They didn't salute but it was clear they would have liked to. At the rear of the train two porters were unloading something. They worked swiftly and in silence, exuding, at forty yards, a prideful efficiency. A fifth man appeared from nowhere, shutting the luggage van. He seemed to be sealing it again. Somebody blew a discreet little noise on something half whistle, half horn and the train moved purposefully away.

Yes, it was Göschenen.

Walter looked at his wrist watch. They were two minutes early or, much more likely, he was two minutes fast.

He shut the window and turned, and at once he was staring. For the little man was dressing. He wasn't fussing now but moving collectedly, packing his ancient attaché case. Walter didn't understand it. Perhaps he was getting out at Airolo. . . .

Nobody got out at Airolo, or not in the dark. Walter was conscious that he wasn't quite at ease. He asked in English: 'Are you getting out at Airolo?' His voice sounded sharper than intended.

The little man didn't answer, and Walter tried him in German. He didn't know why—it had been an instinct.

The little man shook his head.

Walter climbed back into his berth. There was nothing else to do. He lay on his side, watching the little man. The little man sat on the stool, his back to the door, nursing his attaché case. The lid was open but the hinge was nearest Walter. He couldn't see the contents. The little man didn't

look up at him. Instead he was staring at a largish watch; he stared at it unwaveringly, his lips moving in silence. He seemed to be counting.

Thirteen minutes, Walter thought—thirteen minutes through the tunnel to Airolo. The little man had thirteen minutes.

... Of course that was nonsense.

The lights went out suddenly.

Walter found book-matches in the pocket of his dressing-gown. The third lit reluctantly. He said to the little man, shakily, knowing it: 'What are you doing?' It sounded very feeble.

'You'll soon find out.'

The match went out and Walter lit another. He could feel there were only two left. He looked round in the unsteady flame, but the little man read his thoughts. For the first time he looked at him. 'It's above you to the left,' he said. 'Pull it by all means. I've had it disconnected. Like the lights.'

He went back to his watch.

Under Walter's pillow the alarm rang ironically.

... That would be eleven minutes left. Eleven long minutes, two very short matches. A lunatic, a criminal. . . .

Walter struck one of the matches, cursing softly. The little man didn't look up again.

The match burnt his fingers and Walter lay still. He was frightened and not ashamed of it. The little man was a train thief and clearly a determined one. He had his back to the door and he was very much younger. And in that case of his. . . .

A knife, perhaps. A gun. It didn't much matter.

The lamps in the tunnel splashed on the window blind, hinting at light, withholding it. Walter counted the intervals at thirty seconds. He found himself working it out. Forty seconds at say thirty miles an hour, that would be. . . .

He swore again, not softly now, but helplessly. The alarm was running down, for he hadn't turned to stop it. It was running down slowly, grindingly, and when it stopped. . . .

That wouldn't be bad theatre.
He lit the last match.

There was a very loud knock on the door and the little man rose instantly. He shut his case and locked it, putting it on the bed. Then, unspeaking, he opened the door.

A man stepped in quickly holding a torch, behind him the attendant protesting volubly. The stranger flashed his torch round, then said astonishingly: 'Do you mind if I search this compartment?'

Walter found his voice first. 'By all means,' he said.
'Thank you. I've lost my wallet.'

The little man said coldly: 'Why should your wallet be here?'

'Well . . . I find it a trifle difficult. You see, I went down to the restaurant car, and when I came back I seem to have lost my way. I sat in the wrong compartment for some time.'

'Not this one,' the little man said. He was colder than ever, and he was looking at his watch again, frowning.

Walter said quickly: 'It might have been.'

'Ah. . . . You've been out then?'

'For five minutes. To the lavatory.' It happened to be true.

The attendant went on chattering, waving his hands. No one was listening. The train had begun to slow.

The stranger said: 'I'm quite respectable—English, you know.' From a waistcoat pocket he began to produce a visiting card.

'I don't care what you are. You've no shadow of right . . . I haven't left this carriage since I boarded it at Paris. Wherever your wallet is it isn't here.'

'If I could just look around. . . .' The stranger's torch caught the case on the bed. 'There,' he said. 'There.' He struck a sudden attitude, pointing. 'Open it, I demand. . . .'

'It's an outrage,' the little man said.

The attendant, in highly colloquial French, said that it was an outrage.

The Englishman gave the torch to the attendant. He

took a stride to the bed and picked up the attaché case. He held it with his left hand, ripping the leather hinges with his right. He seemed to have very strong hands. The lid, on the locks, fell open, and the stranger put both hands in. For a moment he seemed to be rummaging, then his voice rose alarmingly. ‘There! Look man, there. What did I tell you? Jewellery, my wallet. . . . The man’s a thief.’

The attendant, suddenly quiet, said quietly: ‘Jewellery?’

‘If this isn’t jewellery, I don’t know what is.’ The stranger pulled a necklace from the case. In the light of the torch they looked like pearls. ‘And this is certainly my wallet. Look—money, letters, my driving licence.’ The Englishman rummaged again. ‘And a gun,’ he said finally.

The train had stopped.

The attendant was very formal. ‘A gun,’ he repeated. ‘It is not in order in the carriages of this company. . . . And the permit. . . .’ He held out his hand but the little man didn’t move.

‘We are in Switzerland and I am French. But I have duties still.’ The attendant smiled grimly. ‘A firearm, a lady’s jewellery, a note case this gentleman claims. . . .’ He went to the window and lowered it; he blew a whistle and a policeman, armed, came running.

The little man turned to the stranger, bowing politely. ‘Very pretty,’ he said. ‘My compliments. Oh, very neat indeed.’

I I

WALTER HILLYARD spent a leisurely day in Milan, a city he didn't much care for but whose cooking he found tolerable. He called on banking connections who received him with consideration and in one case some state; and a friend without interests in the world of business gave him dinner at a restaurant in the Galleria. Afterwards he took a taxi to the station, hating its idiom, its early-Fascist pomp. His reservation had already been made.

He found his sleeper and locked the door, smiling. He was relieved that it was a single-berther, but only on grounds of comfort. There had been time to consider the night before; to live with the incident; to decide that it had been a curiosity. It had been the sort of thing which happened to middle-aged bankers once. Its ending at least Walter had rather enjoyed. There had been a magnificent tri-lingual scene at Airolo. At first they had insisted that he must leave the train: he was a material witness and his deposition was essential. Walter had soon fixed that. He had held his fire until a senior policeman arrived, and then he hadn't bothered to explain himself, far less to mention consuls or even ambassadors. He knew that the status of the British Foreign Service had never been lower. Consuls were for tourists and the knighted errand boys who called themselves ambassadors for obeying instructions sent to them from London. So Walter had invoked neither. Instead he had given a name in Zürich, one much respected in Switzerland but held in something other than respect in Her Majesty's Treasury. In his excellent Italian he had asked very firmly that this gentleman be telephoned. Yes, he knew his private number; yes, he even had his card. He had produced it. The senior policeman had been impressed; he had gone himself to telephone, and when

he returned he had saluted. Walter Hillyard could proceed. There would be formalities later, and the so-distinguished signore would understand that he must be prepared to hold himself at the disposal. . . . But meanwhile, on behalf of the Swiss government, apologies, sincere apologies, more apologies. . . .

It had gone on for some time.

Now Walter was amused by it. It had had interesting overtones too. The train thief they had taken away, sullen now, answering questions not in English but in German. The Englishman had gone with him voluntarily. Walter couldn't quite place him. When the senior policeman had arrived he had looked at the Englishman, then seemed to check himself; he had opened his mouth, then shut it again suddenly; his face had gone deliberately blank. And the Englishman had had a notably un-English sense of humour. As they left finally he had turned at the tail of the procession. 'Pearls,' he had said to Walter. 'Pearls and my wallet and a gun. Doing it proud, don't you think? They'll give him ten years at least.'

He had waved airily and departed.

Walter had decided that he was something to do with Wagon Lits. It wasn't unreasonable to conclude that Wagon Lits took steps to protect themselves against international train thieves.

Walter went to bed, waking next morning as the train groaned through what the guide books called the undistinguished purlieus of Naples. He wouldn't have agreed with them. He enjoyed the dirty tunnels, the tantalizing cuttings. He had made the journey a dozen times but had never tried to memorize it. That had been deliberate, since its surprises enchanted him. One minute there was hard brown mountain to the left, inhospitable cactus land, the next, to the right, absurdly blue water. A seashore village almost pastoral, then a cluster of factories round an unashamedly commercial port. It mightn't be for tourists, people with maps and guides, but it fascinated Walter. Then a squawk from the engine and into another tunnel,

out into some pullulating slum. Walter hated slums but he had never succumbed to the convention that Naples was earth's most miserable city. He was a realist about Naples for he knew it better than most. It wasn't some smug northern town piously run by a socially-minded council, but nor was it unrelieved horror. The sum of human misery in Naples wasn't greater than in say—well, say in Prague. Naples, of late, had taken a beating, and it was Walter's opinion that it had been overdone. There was more in Naples than *scugnizzi* and a monstrously corrupt local government. For instance there was life. That was something which the amateur indignant often underestimated.

At the Mergellina station he was met by Enzio Bonavia's Minerva. The huge antique cost a fortune to keep on the road, but Enzio preferred old friends to new ones. The driver was a year or two younger than the motor-car, very pleased with a recent promotion from washer and general handyman to chauffeur. It would have been tactless as well as unnecessary to have inquired what had happened to the chauffeur, since Enzio Bonavia never pensioned servants. When they were unsatisfactory he sacked them, but when they were not they could be certain they would die in his service.

The boy was very full of himself, and Walter, amused, sat beside him in front. He was a handsome, vivid creature—by blood an Albanian, Walter guessed, but now wholly Neapolitan—and he chattered uninhibitedly in dialect. Walter didn't understand all of it, but he knew better than to answer in Italian. That would have frozen instantly. The boy drove vilely, but on reflexes razor sharp. Walter suppressed a chuckle, thinking of George Mears. George Mears drove superbly; George Mears changed down to laugh. This preposterous beautiful boy didn't change gear at all; he drove on the ancient Minerva's grumbling third, revving her mercilessly, braking like a fiend. He made a great deal of noise and it was obvious that he loved it. He lit Walter's English cigarette one-handed, thanking him politely, swearing at a pedestrian in the same sentence. Walter wasn't too frightened; he'd survived this before. He knew they'd arrive

in safety. The saints would provide, for in Naples the saints were powerful. Saint Anthony came from Padua, but who in Naples cared about Padua? Local talent was more than adequate.

The driver chattered on. The signore, the Old One, was marvellous, a prodigy. The maids ran a mile still, and not always in convention. And he could take his bottle as well—one, two, even three. And brandy, Vecchia Romagna. . . .

A wide Neapolitan gesture, arms up, hands off the wheel. . . .

Walter didn't flinch. He was delighted that this outrageous boy admired his master. A genuine affection shone from him. He had none of the Nordic's respect for age as such. What he admired in Enzio Bonavia was much less complicated: Enzio was rich and Enzio knew how to live. He used wealth properly. 'Il padrone sa vivere. Per Bacco! sa vivere' (The driver said something like 'sha', swallowing not only the final e of vivere but most of the rest of it.) At eighty, too. That wasn't the point but it underlined it.

Somehow they got through the town, into the via Roma, turning right into a street which changed its name frequently but in Naples was always Spacca Napoli. The car fought a passage, the driver shouting insults, and soon they turned left into a courtyard. It was suddenly very quiet, very un-Neapolitan. Which, Walter reflected, wasn't remarkable, since this wasn't a Neapolitan house. It was a Spanish. The arms of some Spanish gentleman crumbled above the lintel, the Aragonese nobility were buried in San Domenico not a hundred yards away. The courtyard wasn't empty—Walter counted eight in it besides a mule—but an ageless enchantment held it still. Children were playing but quietly. Even the women spoke softly, and in Naples that was a miracle.

Enzio Bonavia's major-domo met Walter at the door. He wouldn't have thanked you to be called a butler. He said in careful but still accented Italian: 'The signore has not yet risen. He is looking forward with pleasure to receiving you at luncheon. No doubt you would wish to refresh yourself.'

Walter said that certainly he would wish to refresh himself, and the major-domo snapped his fingers. Brandy and black coffee appeared, and when he had dealt with them Walter went upstairs. He was always given the same two rooms on the top floor. There was a balcony and, better, a small staircase to the flat roof. Walter took a bath, then climbed the staircase. The heat was considerable now, and below him the sprawling city flickered. A million and a quarter people lived in it, most nations, all races. Some lived in appalling squalor, a few were comfortable, a tiny minority was rich. All had the splendid sun's vitality.

At Enzio Bonavia's lunch was at half-past twelve, and Walter went down into the dining-room. Like the rest of the house it had been much restored, but not with excessive respect, not fussily. There was the original plastering but modern double windows, beautiful old furniture beautifully cared for but a very efficient serving hatch. The room overlooked the courtyard but the *persiane* hid it. It was pleasantly dark and cool.

Presently Enzio Bonavia came in. 'Walter! I'm delighted to see you.'

'I'm honoured again.'

Enzio Bonavia sat down and the major-domo brought cordials, lemon and ice. Ice was a concession which Enzio was prepared to allow: gin would not have been. He was a tall old man, very erect. In his youth he must have been handsome, and now he wore easily, faintly with apology, an almost unbearable distinction. He had fine white hair *en brosse*, and a lean lined face. In general he looked his years, but his eyes belied them. They were a startling blue, a throwback to the Norman blood which ran in him, moving quickly with a life of their own. In the sardonic old face they were the eyes of a man of forty.

They disposed of a leisurely luncheon, talking trivialities, and afterwards moved to armchairs with coffee and brandy again. Walter said politely: 'Don't let me keep you from your siesta.'

'I don't deny that I usually sleep after lunch—un son-

nellino. Sleep is an important pleasure to the old. But I was expecting your arrival, you know. So I slept late this morning.'

'I don't want to inconvenience you.'

'When you do that I'll tell you.'

Walter explained the situation shortly, Enzio Bonavia silent, asking no questions, watching him intently. When Walter had finished, he said: 'You can't think I'd interfere.' He spoke with the detachment of the very old.

'I didn't presume to. Advice is what I'd hoped for.'

'Advice about this offer?'

'We should all be grateful for it.'

The old man considered for a long time, his eyes for once motionless. 'There are some odd things about this offer. You tell me you consider it about a fifth above our ordinary market value?'

'Yes.'

'And why do you think they've done that?'

'I don't know. None of us knows.'

The bright blue eyes flicked suddenly, then fixed on Walter Hillyard. 'Curious. . . . People in our business don't pay over the odds for nothing.' Enzio Bonavia considered again. 'Our investments—not what we hold personally, but the investments of the firm . . . ?' He looked at Walter in inquiry.

'We don't do the business we did.'

'I know we don't. But I was thinking of specific cases. Is there anything particularly interesting?'

'We've two hundred thousand on loan to a business called Radarmic.'

'I've heard about that.'

'The loan's nothing special in itself, but we hold an option too.'

'An option?'

'When there's an issue the present partners will take out part as shares. We've the option to buy some of them ourselves. At a price agreed, of course. That was a term of the loan.' Walter looked at his shoes. 'The interest on the loan,' he said, 'was moderate.'

Enzio Bonavia chuckled. 'Would that have to go into the prospectus?'

'Perhaps. I haven't asked the lawyers yet.'

'And what sort of a price would you be paying?'

'Assuming an issue of one-pound shares and a placing price of nineteen and threepence we'd be some shillings to the good.'

'On how many shares?'

'That would depend on the size of the issue. We expressed it as a percentage.'

'I see. . . . A good one?'

'Enough to give us control.'

'Control of a radar firm?' The old man thought again. 'Radar and electronics—that could be important.'

'Nowadays they are. That's why we went into them.'

'Ye . . . es. Is there anything special about this Radarmic?'

'Not that I know of. It's a first class expanding concern under first class management and—'

'Quite, quite, quite. And this option of yours. If Baker and Looe were to buy you, the option would go with it?'

'Prima facie—yes.'

Enzio Bonavia seemed to be asleep. But he was not. 'Could we manage it—today?'

'Well, we could manage the issue. We're still good for that. We could easily place a million of Radarmic.'

'A million?'

'That's a rough working figure. The earnings for the last six years would hold it.'

'I don't doubt you. But I wasn't thinking of the issue, I was thinking of the option. Buying enough to control a million is going to cost you something.' Enzio Bonavia chuckled again. 'Even at your private price of something below the placing.'

'We'd have our profit.'

'We'd have to *buy* it first.' The old man stared at his brandy. 'Call it four hundred thousand,' he said finally.

'Can you manage four hundred thousand?'

'We're worth more than four hundred thousand.'

'Tch! Of course we are. But there's a difference between having that sum and having it to play with—to use.'

'It's some way in the future still, but I'd thought that when the time came. . . .'

'You'd take in somebody else? Share with them?'

'Perhaps. If it's really necessary.'

'Very sensible. Delusions of grandeur are stupid and delusions of past grandeur fatal.' Enzio Bonavia poured himself more coffee. His hand was perfectly steady. He said without changing his tone. 'Of course that would cut your profit.'

'Yes.'

'Whereas this offer from Baker and Looe is a certain twenty per cent above our ordinary value?'

'Yes again.'

Enzio picked up his coffee but he didn't seem interested in drinking it. Across the cup's rim he said: 'I find this very difficult. Frankly, I don't *care*, and that makes suspect—useless, really—any advice I offer you. But twenty years ago I'd have told you to accept this offer. And quickly, very quickly. But today. . . .' He smiled his saurian smile. 'Today I don't care. I'm eighty and I still find means to fill a gentle day. I'm not bored, I assure you, but neither am I interested. I'm eighty; I've enough—here in Italy.' Enzio Bonavia rose with decision. 'I'm sorry if I've disappointed you. Now I think I shall rest after all. But I shall look forward to your company at dinner.'

'At seven o'clock?'

'At seven precisely. The car will be ready at half-past eight. I know what time your train leaves.' The blue eyes gleamed ironically. 'How you young men dash about.'

'Not very usefully,' Walter said.

'No. . . . The illusion of action. . . .'

The old man, perfectly steady, moved to the door. Walter held it open for him.

Enzio Bonavia went to his bedroom. He rang the bell, and when a maid appeared said: 'Tu! Send me Giacomo.'

The maid bobbed quickly, and five minutes later the driver came in. He was wearing tight trousers and a singlet, and he began to apologize. 'I was working in the garage. Anna said it was urgent so . . . '

Enzio, from his bed, cut him short. 'It doesn't matter. Play to me.'

The boy went to a cupboard, fetching a violin; he began to play softly, very badly, but Enzio wasn't a music snob. The banal southern airs soothed him deliciously. He let himself think.

He was thinking of Walter Hillyard. He had always liked him, but to a Neapolitan he had never seemed wholly adult. This Baker and Looe—Enzio had heard things about Baker and Looe. They were a front. Well, the Hillyards too had been a front, a front for the Bonavias, as Baker and Looe was one for Steiffer.

Enzio Bonavia knew a great deal about Steiffer.

If Steiffer was Baker and Looe, then Bonavias was finished. Enzio felt no resentment. Fronts. . . . They were useful, often necessary, but they were no sort of match for the men who stood behind them. Baker and Looe were a front for Steiffer—he must be fifty, a stripling—but what had once been the Bonavias' front now ran Bonavias. Clearly that was hopeless, quite past saving; it wasn't worth worrying about. Not at eighty. There was much he could have said but hadn't. Not to Walter Hillyard. The Hillyards were unimportant and the Bonavias were done for, one of them uncaring, near to death, the other, his nephew, some English lordling. Neither had sons. There was a law in these things, a necessary rise and fall. You didn't fight it, or not at eighty.

Enzio Bonavia grunted and for a moment the boy stopped playing. 'I'm not asleep yet.'

The boy began again and Enzio watched him. Under his singlet his chest was superb. His waist was tiny, his trousers extremely tight. Enzio thought him beautiful.

Forty years ago—no, twenty . . .

Enzio Bonavia sighed in his sleep.

Walter got home at six to find there was a dinner party. Cynthia met him with regrets, but not with apologies, and indeed she had no need of them. On the contrary she hadn't been expecting him till next day, and had taken the opportunity to invite somebody to whom they owed hospitality but whom she knew her husband detested. It was J. Barrington Smythe of Radarmic. Jim Anstey was coming too, and Walter had always liked Anstey. But J. Barrington Smythe. . . .

Cynthia had shrugged, and Walter had said that he could take the man just this time more. He was conscious that it was less than gracious—after all she'd been trying to spare him—but Cynthia seemed satisfied. He went upstairs to change, glancing at his letters as he passed them in the hall. There was one in a handwriting he recognized and, a little ashamed of himself, he put it deliberately in his pocket. He'd open it after dinner, for it was a letter from Doctor Macrae. He wasn't, at this moment, in a mood for Doctor Macrae. There was J. Barrington Smythe to be suffered first.

He was a prosperous-looking man addicted to trousers with expensive belts and off-beat ties clamped by elaborate devices. He never wore a waistcoat and he did himself very well. Tonight he wore a double-breasted dinner jacket with a collar which Walter thought prissy, and a narrow black tie. He arrived without his wife, and with an explanation of her indisposition rather too detailed to be quite convincing. Cynthia hid her annoyance, but her party was now lop-sexed. Smythe went on talking, a fraction too heartily. He had had several before arrival, but he was into his third cocktail very quickly. Walter had noticed that he was being driven by a chauffeur. He thought it just as well.

They went into dinner, Walter doubling-up with James Anstey. On his right was a Lady Smith, a notorious trenched-woman, and Walter knew that he needn't do much more for her than watch her plate and wineglass. He chatted to Anstey easily.

Social disaster fell without warning. Smythe had been talking about sailing, which was one of his leads to the fact

that he had served in the war in the Navy. It was something he liked you to know, and it had gone to his head impossibly. He was much more naval than any naval officer would have allowed himself. . . . The Navy—ah, there was a service for you! Tradition, continuity, Nelson. . . .

There was a moment of silence whilst Smythe gulped some wine. Into it Cynthia Hillyard said coolly: 'Lord Nelson was a scoundrel.'

Smythe put his glass down and Walter pricked his ears. He knew that voice. Cynthia didn't use it often, but when she did. . . . He hoped. . . .

By God he did not! Barrington Smythe annoyed him. This was going to be enjoyable.

Smythe said unbelievingly: 'A scoundrel?' Everybody was listening.

'An unmitigated scoundrel.'

'If you're thinking of Lady Hamilton, I'll admit. . . .'

'I wasn't thinking of Emma Hart at all. I don't care a fig for his mistresses. What I resent is murder.'

'Murder?' Smythe was incredulous.

'Cold-blooded, treacherous murder. Don't say you didn't know.'

'Really, I. . . .'

'He murdered Admiral Caracciolo. He had him tried by a Neapolitan court-martial on a British warship and hanged. The capitulations with Ruffo notwithstanding.'

Smythe said weakly: 'I'm afraid I didn't know.'

'But you *should* know. The more people know about Nelson the better.' Cynthia smiled her most social smile. 'I'll tell you if you're interested.'

'I. . . . I think perhaps. . . .'

But Cynthia was away. In her polite cool voice she was destroying Nelson. . . . King Ferdinand—not Bomba, of course—that bitch of a queen Maria Carolina, the English adventurer Acton, the incompetent French with forces too small for the job. . . . She knew it pretty well, Walter decided. He glanced at Smythe—rather white, stone sober now—hiding a smile. Just the same he was surprised. Cynthia was

a very social woman; she wouldn't cut loose like this except from the sharpest feeling. Cynthia was Benenden and Vassar, where her father had sensibly despatched her. Cynthia Hillyard.

And now she was Naples and that absurd Parthenopean republic. He hadn't known she cared a damn for it. He'd thought of her as English, very English indeed, Lord Laver's only daughter.

It seemed she was still a Bonavia. They weren't people to underestimate.

He knew better than to interrupt her, to try some banal switch. He could sense she was cooling. . . . Poor Smythe. He couldn't help being an ass.

After dinner Walter sought him out; he was as nice to him as he could be, flattering him, soothing. But it wasn't long before he regretted it, for Smythe had the resilience of his type. He said to Walter in a confidential boom: 'I'd like to talk to you some time.'

'Talk now.'

'Oh no. I never mix business with pleasure. Rule of mine, y'know.'

'Sometimes it's a good one.'

'I've found it so. I thought that tomorrow. . . .'

'I've been away. I'll be pretty busy tomorrow.'

But Smythe had quite recovered; he was a thruster, utterly insensitive. 'I'll ring in the morning then. I'll make a date.'

'You may not get me if you ring in the morning. I expect I'll be seeing my doctor.'

Smythe said perfunctorily: 'Oh, I hope. . . .'

'It's nothing,' Walter said. 'Nothing at all.' He knew he hadn't said it well; he'd wholly lacked conviction. Not that it mattered. Smythe would notice nothing.

Smythe had noticed nothing. 'It's about Radarmic, of course. I've been wondering. . . .'

His plummy voice boomed on.

On the other side of the room Walter noticed that Anstey had risen suddenly. He had been talking to Cynthia and he had excellent manners, but now he was moving across to

Walter. Smythe was saying importantly: 'So you see, I'd been wondering whether the time hadn't come. . . . We oughtn't to talk here'—he lowered his voice or tried to—'but those contracts with the Ministry are as good as signed.'

Walter, more sharply than he had meant to, asked: 'There's something special then?' but it wasn't Smythe who answered. Jim Anstey said smoothly: 'Not what I'd call special. But we've been in negotiation with one of the ministries for some time. If the contracts come off. . . .' He looked at Smythe in amusement. 'I think what Smythe is trying to say is that if we do get these contracts it might be the moment to consider the whole future of Radarmic.' For a moment Anstey hesitated. 'Its financial future.'

For James Anstey it had been almost a speech. He smiled an apology.

Barrington Smythe began to relax. 'I'll ring then.'

'We'll ring,' Anstey said. He looked at Smythe again curiously, then walked back to Cynthia. Walter couldn't hear what he said to her, but Cynthia laughed.

Later, as he went to bed, Walter opened the letter from Doctor Macrae. It was just as he had expected. It told him nothing—only the essential.

Doctor Macrae would like to see him urgently.

Walter woke next morning, surprised that Cynthia was before him. She was sitting at her dressing-table, and she turned as she heard him move. Her hands were at her hair still, and the classic pose became her. She smiled, for Cynthia almost uncertainly. 'I'm sorry I let you down last night. I'm sorry I was rude.'

He laughed. 'I wouldn't have called it rude. You can't be rude with intention. It's quite the wrong word.'

'Well, bloody then.'

'I wouldn't say bloody either. I'd say you were a trifle severe, but then that idiot Smythe is a horrible temptation. To tell you the truth I rather enjoyed it.' Walter began on

his tea. 'But I didn't know you minded—minded about all that.'

'Nelson, you mean?'

'Not only Nelson. Ferdinand and the French.'

'I'm not sure I do. Ferdinand's *lazzaroni* murdered a good many people, but I couldn't pretend they were people I'd have had much time for. What gets me is pomposity—ignorance. People ought to know what they're talking about.'

He asked mildly: 'People ought to know about Naples?'

'Certainly. If they're shooting the party line on Nelson.'

'Cynthia, I've a confession myself. I'd no idea you knew so much.'

'Naturally I know—I'm a Bonavia. And talking of Bonavias—'

'I saw Enzio, of course.'

She turned from him before she answered, watching his reflection in the mirror. He saw her face tauten. 'What did he say?'

'He said he was too old to care. He said he couldn't advise me.'

'But was that all?' Her voice was quiet still, undemanding, but edged by an undertone of urgency.

'To be honest it was not.'

'Then?'

'He said that twenty years ago he'd have told us to accept. And quickly.'

'I wish you would,' she said.

'I know you think I'm a fool.'

She rose from the dressing-table, coming to the bed, standing at its foot, facing him. Her dressing-gown swung open and her hands were on her hips. It was an attitude which Benenden wouldn't have approved at all, nor Vassar. Cynthia Bonavia said: 'I think you're a fool, but there's one thing I'd like you to know. I don't think you're an ignoble fool.' She dropped her hands, pulling the dressing-gown shut again.

Cynthia Hillyard walked back to the dressing-table.

Walter went to the bathroom and shaved. When he was dressed he came back into the bedroom. Cynthia was in bed again, but she wasn't sleeping. From the door he said levelly: 'I had another letter from Macrae last night. He wants to see me urgently.'

'Come nearer.'

Walter went to the bed. He couldn't read her expression. She took his hand again, holding it. For a moment he thought she was going to kiss it. Finally she dropped it. 'Good luck,' she said. 'Good luck, Walter.'

I 2

CHARLES RUSSELL was talking to Mortimer in his untidy room; he was saying urbanely: 'Jenkins did well.'

'Jenkins usually does. You told me to use my best. So I did.'

'That creature of Steiffer's, that German—what'll the Swiss do to him?'

'They'll give him ten years, I should think. Perhaps rather more.'

'I suppose he won't implicate Steiffer?'

'I shouldn't think so—Steiffer's agents don't. Not that it would matter if he did, since the Swiss wouldn't act on it. Steiffer has a villa at Lugano; he spends a lot of money there.' Mortimer shrugged. 'You know what the Swiss are.'

'Then what'll you do with Jenkins himself?'

'Nothing. We'll leave him in Switzerland. The top Swiss police know perfectly well who he is, and they know perfectly well that German wasn't a train thief. But they'll try him on that basis since they don't approve of murder. Or not on Swiss territory. So we'll have to play ball and leave Jenkins in Switzerland. He's the most important witness—an outraged private citizen. The Swiss could hold him if it came to that, and it'd look odd if we tried to get him out. Very—very unco-operative.'

Russell smiled. 'Rather unprofessional in fact?'

'Yes. Not playing fair.'

Russell said solemnly: 'We must always play fair.'

'It usually pays. Not that we couldn't use him here.'

'Here in England? You really think . . .?'

'I don't know what to think. This is London, not an international train. No pushing a dead man into a tunnel and being a hundred miles away in another country before

he's missed. You said yourself that Hillyard leads a pretty regular life. He doesn't offer much opportunity to a professional, and if it came to an open killing—an amateur, crazy one—there's nothing we can do in any case.'

Russell said unhappily. 'That's the logic of it. It's unfortunate that in our profession logic has a habit of collapsing.' He thought for some time intently. 'Do you think we should tell Hillyard now?'

'No, not yet. I still see no gain in that. But I'd like your authority to tell Mears more of the real story.'

'That chauffeur—your contact? Why? You told me he's middle-aged.'

'He is. I wouldn't stick him with protecting Hillyard—that wouldn't be fair again. But I asked him for information about his movements and he gave it. Very useful it was. Hillyard is alive because of it.' Mortimer smiled dryly. 'When a contact co-operates there's nothing like showing him he hasn't been wasting his time.'

'Mears is secure, I suppose?'

'I think so. I think it's worth the risk. Mears is important to us.'

'All right. . . . And the rest?'

'What rest, sir?'

'The protection. The *professional* protection.'

'We're doing our best.'

'I won't interfere for it wouldn't help. I'm not an expert. I won't even ask questions. You're doing your best, and your best I accept.' Russell stood up and his voice was tense. 'But make it a good one, won't you?'

I 3

DOCTOR MACRAE was an admirable judge of character, too wise to attempt with Walter a reassurance he did not feel. He avoided both suavity and also the smell of crisis. . . . Walter was a good deal worse than he, Macrae, had known, and it would be an insult to blink the possibility that his condition could still deteriorate. Had he *felt* worse lately—the last few days? No? That was good. Doctor Macrae had been worried, for the specialist's instructions were that insulin was immediately necessary, and Macrae had been seriously concerned to find that Walter had gone abroad. . . . A matter of four days? To Walter four days without insulin could have been serious. Macrae was delighted that they hadn't been: that at least was hopeful. He had considered getting in touch through Mrs. Hillyard but, after consulting the specialist, had decided on balance against it. He was relieved to have been right.

Well, there it was. One dose a day to start with. With luck it needn't be increased for years, perhaps not ever, but in this sort of case there was no guarantee. It had gone pretty fast already. Oral treatment wasn't general yet, and with many it wasn't effective. Elaborate tests were necessary. Walter could take them if he liked, but probably he wouldn't. One soon got very expert with a hypodermic. Meanwhile Macrae would give him the first shot. And afterwards? Macrae would send a nurse round till Walter felt confident. Time? Twelve o'clock at the office? Certainly. And for Saturdays and Sundays there was no doubt a doctor near Walter's home. Name? Thank you. Macrae would look him up and telephone.

It was all very business-like. Macrae knew his patients perfectly.

And of course there was diet. That must be taken seriously now. Alcohol was the great betrayer, since most sorts of drink held much more sugar than the layman realized. Total abstinence? No, Macrae needn't insist on that. A little dry wine—but dry. The great thing was to keep off gin: gin had more sugar than a grocer's.

Doctor Macrae gave Walter his first injection. He shook hands briskly, entirely matter of fact.

Walter was grateful to him.

When Walter returned to Bonavias he could see that his secretary was impressed. She said in a voice which she kept for special visitors: 'There's a Minister here to see you.'

Walter misunderstood her. 'A minister? Wanting a subscription? He's not a missionary, I hope.'

'Oh no, sir. The other sort of minister. He's Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Ministry of Development.'

'I didn't know I had a date.'

'You haven't, sir. He's come without one. He said it was important.'

Walter thought it odd. And Smythe, mouthing about his Ministry last night, could only have meant the Ministry of Development.

'What's his name?'

'Mr. Robert Parratt, sir.'

'Bob Parratt? I hardly know him.' It was the truth. Walter had met him twice at parties and he had listened to a speech of his. God help us, what a speech! Walter considered. 'Bring him in,' he said finally. He added a little sourly, for he had wanted to think: 'It's a bit thick really, but we can hardly throw him out.'

The junior Minister came in and sat down. Walter knew his background. He had been in business, and he hadn't been doing badly. He had gone into politics after the war, and again he hadn't done badly. His physical appearance, his solid earnest manner and clipped moustache, was a guarantee of that. Bob Parratt wouldn't do badly. Nor yet particularly

well. He was a junior Minister now, but he would hardly go higher. Walter suspected he knew it, since he was a very long way from a fool. No first-rate Ministry would ever be run by Bob Parratt. Walter wondered what his real ambitions were. Back to the City possibly—a knighthood and an insurance company, a seat on a major board. It might even be the Bank, the Bank of England. Not one of the Treasury stooges but what was still thought of as a genuine seat on the Court. The Court of the Bank of England. . . .

It was the final accolade, and privately Walter didn't think Parratt would make it. Certainly not unless he learned how to talk as distinct from making speeches. He was saying now: 'I find this awkward. I don't know where to start.'

'Try the beginning.' Walter was polite but hardly amiable. He considered that amiability, this morning, was something he might excuse himself.

'Then it's about this takeover.'

'What takeover?'

'Well, there are rumours, you know. Baker and Looe. . . .'

Walter said crisply: 'There's no question of a takeover. There can't be. Takeovers are seventy-five per cent—special meetings and resolutions under the Companies Act. Somebody makes an offer, but he doesn't make it unconditional till the seventy-five per cent is in the bag. And none of that applies to Bonavias. We're a private company and we hold the equity ourselves. Talk of a takeover is nonsense.'

'I was using the word very loosely. Call it a merger—an amalgamation. The public isn't interested in the technicalities.'

Walter said reflectively: 'The public.' He had remembered that Bob Parratt's majority wasn't much more than three hundred. His constituency was a dormitory, part of it safe as houses, part of it. . . . Well, part of it thought. That was always an embarrassment for a Member. Parratt would have liked something safer but he'd never been offered it. That, come to think of it, was just about his rating in his party—a junior Minister with a damned shaky seat.

But he was talking again. 'I wasn't really thinking

about the public. I was considering—well, the government.'

Walter kept his face still but only just. From Bob Parratt 'the government' struck him as ridiculous. 'I can see that another takeover—a really juicy one—might be difficult to live with.'

'It would.'

'But I thought the Clackmannon Committee was going to fix the takeovers.'

'The Clackmannon Committee will be producing recommendations which, if legislation follows. . . .'

Walter said quickly: 'I see,' but it didn't halt Parratt. To Bob Parratt an uncrossed T was bait irresistible. 'And we are not without existing powers. The Board of Trade, you know—the Insurance and Companies Division. Under legislation as it already stands there are certain powers to make rules and regulations, a sort of code in fact, and. . . .'

He pounded away, fluent and inescapably boring. Walter was certain he didn't realize it. His officials wouldn't have told him, and his friends. . . .

He had no friends: a politician hadn't. Only enemies and what he called colleagues.

Walter finally interrupted. 'I'm not sure I'm following you. If I am, you don't seem too worried about the takeovers. You seem to feel you can contain them, at any rate in future. In any case this wouldn't be a takeover. It would be a straightforward voluntary merger. Six merchant banks have merged into three already.'

Bob Parratt looked at him squarely—much too squarely, much too man-to-man. 'Those were quite different,' he said.

'But why?'

'There are rumours that it's Baker and Looe who would like to merge with Bonavias.'

'We started from there.'

'But there are also rumours about Baker and Looe themselves.'

But Walter wasn't playing. Parratt had begun to irritate him. 'What rumours?'

'Haven't you heard them?'

'You can't run a business on rumours.'

Bob Parratt leaned forward portentously. 'If these rumours are true, Baker and Looe are the English arm of a foreign organization. One hardly . . . hardly friendly.'

'And if they're untrue?'

It was a facer and so intended. Parratt didn't like it. He said at last: 'It's a risk we would rather not run.'

'But why is it your risk?'

The junior Minister said stiffly: 'I didn't intrude on you to amuse myself.' He was suddenly more self-important than ever, conscious of some distant Grail. 'I called here on instructions.'

'You can't tell me whose?'

'Naturally I can't do that.'

Walter shrugged, more irritated than ever. 'I don't think it really matters. As I understand it you've come here on the instructions of somebody more—more senior than yourself. That somebody, and I take it his colleagues, would prefer that Bonavias didn't merge with Baker and Looe.' Walter smiled politely. 'I note that preference on behalf of Bonavias.' He looked at Parratt coolly, and the smile had gone. 'Is that all I can do for you?'

'Well. . . . Frankly, no.'

Walter looked at his watch. 'Please don't hesitate.'

'Frankly. . . .' Parratt caught Walter's eye again, not man-to-man this time, but almost dog to master. He was appealing to him now. 'I'd sleep happier for the assurance that Bonavias would stay Bonavias.'

Walter said involuntarily: 'You must be mad. Look, you've been in the City; you've been a director; you know you're asking the impossible. I'm a director of Bonavias but only one of them. I can give you no such assurance. I can give it to no one.'

'You're a shareholder too.'

'I am. But I don't control.'

'You've got a piece, though—a damned important piece.'

'It's thirty per cent in practice. That's a long way short of final. What makes you think it's important?'

'I . . . we . . . we hear things.'

'You must—you must indeed.' Walter inspected Parratt with curiosity. He was sorry for him but not very. 'So for reasons which I mustn't probe you think that thirty per cent might be decisive?'

'I do.' Bob Parratt corrected himself. 'We do.'

'And you're asking for an assurance that I'll use this thirty per cent to prevent any merger? You're talking to a shareholder now, remember, not a director.'

Bob Parratt nodded.

Walter said lightly: 'It may even be illegal.' He had spoken in jest, anxious to relax the tension, but Parratt was humourless.

'Oh, I'm sure. . . .'

But Walter had risen. He had been about to add: 'And in any case it's an impertinence,' but a glance at Parratt stopped him. . . . Poor earnest, afflicted, ambitious little man. Walter stood for a moment whilst Parratt in turn rose reluctantly. At the door Walter said remotely, meaning none of it: 'I'm sorry I can't help you.'

'Thanks all the same.'

'A pleasure.'

Parratt departed and Walter sat down again. He started to work but could not.

. . . It's not my day.

In the Lion that evening, over the second beer, Walter asked Mears: 'You never married, did you?'

'As a matter of fact I did.'

'I didn't know that.'

'Why should you? It was twenty years ago. I haven't seen her for eighteen, nor heard of her. I suppose I could get a divorce but. . . .' Mears shrugged. 'Once seemed enough.'

'But you've had a piece?'

'I have.'

'Will you advise me then?'

'About women? Nobody can advise you about women.
No man in his senses tries.'

'I know. But tell me something. Did you give in to her?'

'Like hell I did.'

'What does that mean?'

'It means she wiped her feet on me. I liked it at first, then I stood it. And then I couldn't. Lucky she bee-ed off.' Mears stared from the window, preoccupied but not with matrimony. Recently he'd been queer, Walter thought—worried, a little withdrawn. He needed a holiday, and Walter would arrange it, pay for it if necessary.

Not at the moment, though. For the moment he needed Mears.

He followed his glance from the window. Mears was staring at a black Mercedes. Walter said idly: 'Nice car.'

'Funny sort of car to see outside the Lion.'

'So's a Rolls, I suppose.'

'Yes, but we come inside here. We drink. Those—those people sit like dummies.'

'Necking perhaps.'

'The driver? Two blokes behind? They're always the same.'

'You've seen them here before?'

'Twice before.'

'Oh well. . . . And we were talking about women.'

'Not women again.' George Mears was decided.

'But certainly. I'll buy you another beer to pay for it.' Walter went to the bar and did so. 'I'm serious, though. I asked you about giving in. I'm thinking of giving in.'

'To the mistress?'

'Who else?'

Mears said dryly: 'It mightn't be a bad idea.'

'You think I'm a hearthrug tartar?'

'I don't know what that is. I think you're a stubborn old ox. You gets an idea and nothing in God's earth will shift it.'

'I dare say you're right.'

'I know I'm right.' Mears grunted. 'Not that I know what it's about.' He waved his beer as Walter began to speak.

'And not that I *want* to know. But I'll tell you one thing. If you do give in you'll enjoy it.'

'Yes,' Walter said, 'I'd enjoy it. I'd enjoy it very much.'

They went outside and Mears held the door of the Rolls. 'Home, sir?' he asked.

Walter didn't answer at once for he was looking at the black Mercedes. The men in it were reading newspapers. He couldn't see their faces.

He shrugged. He had other things to think about than men in a Mercedes reading newspapers.

Walter turned off the bedside lamp, for it was easier to talk in the dark. He said to Cynthia: 'I'm on insulin now.'

'I know.'

'How do you know?' He was surprised and sounded it.

'I rang Macrae.'

'You shouldn't have done that.'

'Why not? I'm your wife. I'll do the injections—I've done a bit of nursing. It . . . it would be something I could do for you.'

'I'd be grateful. That is, if it wouldn't bother you. But I'll have to learn too.' He was silent for some time before he added: 'Of course this makes a difference.'

'Being on insulin?'

'Yes.'

'What sort of difference?'

'I meant Bonavias—all that. Being a sick man.'

She said calmly: 'You mean it's an escape?'

He chuckled, relaxed. She wasn't the most delicate of women; she thought much too lucidly to beat about the bush. It was one of her attractions.

In the quarter-light he looked at her. Certainly it wasn't her only one.

He said quietly: 'I'm a middle-aged diabetic. I suppose you wouldn't consider coming to Capri with a middle-aged diabetic?'

It was Cynthia's turn for astonishment. 'Capri? I thought

you hated it. I remember. . . .'

'I'm not saying now I'd like it.'

'But you'd go there—take me with you?"

'It's an idea. . . . Would you come?"

'Of course I'd come.'

'You're a marvellous wife.'

'You'd be surprised,' she said.

There was another long silence before she spoke again.

'Walter, are you asleep?"

'Not yet.'

'Walter, is that a promise?"

'Not quite. Not yet. Call it a preliminary inquiry. I'm thinking still.'

'Don't think too long.'

I4

HE was a beautifully dressed young man, one of the Prime Minister's personal private secretaries, and Charles Russell received him politely. He had been chosen for his job, which was harmless and quite without responsibility, over the heads of others even more elegant. The Prime Minister's intention had been to show that the young man's race was excluded from nothing—but nothing. In fact he was a messenger, and now he was delivering a message.

Russell drew the tape from the meticulously sealed envelope, reading the familiar rubric. . . . The tape might be played as often as wished, but no transcription must be made. In no circumstances whatsoever. Brief notes might be taken provided they gave no indication of the source; provided they were treated as Top Secret; and provided they were not retained for more than twenty-four hours. Then they must be destroyed.

Russell smiled. These tapes were a thing of the Prime Minister's, one of his idiosyncrasies. Russell approved them. Whitehall held a hundred competent writers of minutes, perhaps a dozen officials who could write a respectable letter. The Prime Minister didn't compete with either. He wrote poorly himself, and in any case he was a busy man; but give him a tape recorder and at once he spoke with a racy precision which his officials could neither match nor wished to. On tape the Prime Minister was well worth listening to.

Besides, a tape could, at a pinch, be disowned. A minute or letter couldn't.

Russell put this one on to his own machine, listening carefully. He wasn't surprised by the news it gave him: indeed he had rather been expecting it. . . . Russell would remember their conversation in the country? He did? Then

the Prime Minister had been considering it, and the more he considered the more he inclined to the view that the essential of this affair was not the relationship between Bonavias and the Bakerloo but that between Bonavias and Radarmic. Russell would also remember that they had touched on certain possibilities in connection with the latter. The Prime Minister had now decided that that avenue must be explored. (The tape emitted an apologetic little cough for the banality and a request to put more soda in it. Then it went on.) As a jog to Colonel Russell's memory—doubtless unnecessary—the Prime Minister would remind him that they had agreed that if Radarmic could be *detached* from Bonavias, Bonavias themselves could. . . . Well, the rape of Bonavias by the Bakerloo wouldn't in that case be an immediate national disaster. Immediate—that was the operative word. (Another little cough, for the Prime Minister wasn't insensitive to clichés. He used them when they served him, but he was a considerate man.) Certain information had been coming in from the Continent. . . .

Russell stopped the tape. He didn't suffer from official jealousy, and he knew that the Prime Minister had very good sources. Not the rubbish which went through the office of the Permanent Under Secretary of State, far less the formal dispatches of diplomatists who often couldn't speak the language of the country to which they were accredited. But the real hard, hard-won information. Russell had a hand in some of it and close connections with the rest. He knew what the Prime Minister was referring to since he had already seen most of it. He flicked the switch again.

. . . Information had been coming in from the Continent, and there didn't seem much doubt that something was brewing. Steiffer had plans, that was clear. There had been much coming and going between Steiffer and his government, and a little of that, a very little, had leaked. Something must be done about Radarmic and quickly.

Not that the difficulties had diminished. In particular they were all still hobbled by the bleak necessities of security, since the Prime Minister couldn't accept the risk of telling

Bonavias the real position about Radarmic. That Radarmic was very near to extensive contracts with the Ministry of Development was something which had had to be disclosed ('I wish that Ministry would pull its finger out') but it might be months before their real nature could be made public. Nor was the Prime Minister prepared to go to Bonavias with some unproven story about the master of Baker and Looe, far less with security information about his probable intentions. He's rather play it safer—straight.

Rough if you preferred it.

For that was what it came to. Now there was one course open, and only one. (The tape went silent for three professionally-timed seconds.) They must find another bank, one willing to risk the appearance of kicking Bonavias when they were already nearly down. Lohmeyers had been mentioned. . . .

And they hadn't too much time, for the Prime Minister didn't doubt that once the Bakerloo had safely bagged Bonavias, means could be found to keep a grip on Radarmic. Means could be found to prevent what would amount to repayment of a debt to a creditor reluctant to receive it. Any law suit on that sort of thing would be a Chancery lawyer's benefit, a well fee-ed, interminable benefit. . . . Injunctions, blah in some judge's chambers, preliminary hearings. . . . If they once got Bonavias Baker and Looe could stall for years and would. No, since it was necessary to detach Radarmic it was necessary to detach it whilst Bonavias was still Bonavias. Bonavias mightn't like it, probably wouldn't, but they hadn't the same motives to oppose it—not the same motives as Steiffer. Faced with expensive litigation they'd probably cut their losses. The right to repay existed, or a lawyer could say so. The Prime Minister didn't think Bonavias would risk the House of Lords on it. You might as well toss a sixpence. Which was a whole lot cheaper.

Just the same they couldn't rush at it. They'd all look fools if Bonavias were determined to hold off Baker and Looe for ever, and were capable of doing so. A junior Minister

(the little cough again)—a stooge had been despatched to Bonavias to scout round that one, but his report hadn't been reassuring. So they were back again at Lohmeyers. That would naturally be delicate. Happily the Treasury had excellent relations with Lohmeyers: a hint, a pretty firm one, had been dropped. As the Prime Minister had said once before, it wouldn't be the first time Lohmeyers had obliged a British government. Last time it had cost rather more.

So the next move would probably be a pass by Lohmeyers at Barrington Smythe and Anstey. Russell knew Carl Christian, of course? He was a very bright star in a very bright galaxy. Then probably Smythe and Anstey would go smelling round Bonavias themselves. . . .

And after that they'd see.

Well, there it was. Thank you for listening.

Russell, smiling again, rewound the tape. He thought it admirable: it saved a great deal of time, and in more ways than one. The Prime Minister would know that Russell too had sources; Russell might have heard much of this already, and the Prime Minister wouldn't want to be bothered by reports from the Executive of what in fact he was doing himself.

Also, to do him justice, he wouldn't wish Russell to waste his own time. The Prime Minister wasn't a Permanent Secretary. He didn't consider his position sancrosanct, nor the leisure of his subordinates necessarily at his disposal. On the contrary he was considerate.

And very well served.

Russell ran the tape again, making a note or two. The Prime Minister had spoken of time, and clearly rightly. Radarmic must be detached—Russell chuckled, for he approved the word—detached from Bonavias before Baker and Looe could gobble them and somehow block the detaching. But Steiffer would see it in reverse: Bonavias must be secured whilst they still had Radarmic. Without Radarmic Bonavias would be something of a shell.

Steiffer didn't buy shells.

Russell wrote thoughtfully:

1. The only safe assumption is always the least favourable. So I am assuming that the Prime Minister's manoeuvres with Lohmeyers will reach Steiffer's ears. His sources are quite first class, and in any case the City is a sounding board.
2. All the evidence suggests that Steiffer isn't particularly interested in Bonavias as such. What he wants is Radarmic.

Russell chuckled quietly. Borrowing for a moment the Prime Minister's style on tape he added:

And could he make us hop with it!

3. Therefore the moment he hears of Lohmeyer's interest in Radarmic he'll see it as a race. He'll accept that race.
4. But the Bakerloo's offer for Bonavias is at the moment deadlocked. Walter Hillyard is the cause, and Steiffer knows it. Walter Hillyard is already a target, and with urgency now thrown in the time factor will double.

Russell re-read this, then carefully destroyed it. He sealed the tape again, giving it back to the elegant young man. He chose an armchair, considering intently, smiling without amusement. For another thought had struck him. If Lohmeyers did get Radarmic, Steiffer wouldn't be pleased with Baker and Looe. With Sabin Scott in particular. Scott was Steiffer's man, in Steiffer's sense a vassal, and vassals who failed Steiffer. . . .

If Lohmeyers got Radarmic, Sabin Scott would be in something of a spot. If Lohmeyers got Radarmic, Russell would be happy not to be Sabin Scott.

He shrugged. He wasn't responsible for Sabin Scott. For Walter Hillyard he was.

I 5

WALTER had made an appointment with Barrington Smythe and James Anstey, and he had had more than a presentiment that what they had to say would be important. But he hadn't an inkling that they would be coming to destroy him.

They arrived at Bonavias at half-past ten and were shown at once to Walter's room. Smythe wore a suit in what he imagined was the American fashion and a crocodile belt round a waist which was beginning to disturb him. He was concealing some uneasiness behind a manner even more exacerbating than usual. James Anstey was very quiet. He sat in his chair lightly, watching J. Barrington Smythe. Smythe said heartily: 'Well, here we are.'

'What can I do for you?'

'It's delicate, I. . . .'

... Out with it, man!

'It's about Radarmic,' Anstey said. 'Naturally.'

But Smythe was charging in again, offended, very conscious of J. Barrington Smythe. 'Yes, of course. We're authorized to disclose that we've been negotiating for some time with the Ministry of Development. Work of national importance, y'know.'

'Congratulations.'

It wasn't quite the answer Smythe had been expecting, and for a moment it threw him off-stride. 'Ye . . . es.' He collected himself visibly. 'If these contracts materialize it'll be a very big thing for us. Very big indeed.'

'We'd be worth a lot of money,' Anstey said. He was a scientist and he enjoyed his work; he had more than enough for his needs. The prospect of a fortune didn't seem especially to excite him.

'*Radarmic* would be worth a lot of money.' Smythe had

taken umbrage again; he added importantly: 'The distinction is essential.'

'Quite.'

'A lot of *potential* money.'

But Walter had decided that Smythe could beat his bush for ever; Walter would have to make his point for him. 'You were wondering whether the moment had arrived for an issue?'

'Yes. If you put it that way.'

'Is there another?'

Anstey said gently: 'That states it a little baldly. In point of fact we're both of us children in these things. We're wholly in your hands. All I feel entitled to say is that with whacking great contracts as good as signed. . . .' A shrug cut the sentence short. Jim Anstey wasn't talkative.

'What are these contracts worth?' Walter asked it smiling. There seemed to be some mystery about these contracts.

'I'm not sure I ought. . . .'

Jim Anstey spoke briefly again and Walter whistled softly.

'You seem surprised.' It was Smythe again, defensively.

'I am. I'm pleasantly surprised.'

'Then would you say it was the moment for the issue?'

'Almost certainly there won't be a better one.'

Smythe drew a breath. 'Then can you handle it?'

'We can.'

'You're sure? With these contracts in addition—'

But Anstey intervened again. 'You mustn't think us barbarous. What's worrying Smythe is the extra value which these contracts will put on the business. I dare say you'd a figure in mind before.'

'I had indeed. On the basis of past earnings it was round about a million. But now we'll have to do some sums. With these contracts on top of your past record it's going to be more than a million.'

'Much more?' Smythe asked.

'I shouldn't be surprised.'

'You wouldn't care to guess?'

'I'd rather do some work on it.'

'All right, *I'll* guess. . . . A million and a half?'

'Quite possibly.'

'And could you place a million and a half?'

'Of Radarmic—comfortably.'

Anstey said something which sounded like 'Damn', and Walter looked at him. He couldn't be sure of his expression, but it might almost have been disappointment. Walter asked Anstey and Anstey alone: 'That doesn't suit you?'

'It doesn't suit *me*, but then I've inhibitions. To tell you the truth I was hoping you'd give us an excuse for what we're doing.'

'I don't think I follow.'

'You will.' Anstey spoke resignedly; he waved at J. Barrington Smythe. 'All yours,' he said. 'All yours, alas. Try and behave yourself.'

Barrington Smythe glared. He would have given a great deal for an immediately effective rejoinder; he couldn't think of one. Instead he said ponderously: 'The issue would be all right then?'

'I told you.'

Barrington Smythe began to collect himself again. He pushed himself more upright in his chair, pulling his elaborate belt in, wincing as he did so. He had an uneasy feeling that he wasn't going to put very tactfully what he now had to say. He wasn't a natural bully: bullying gave him no pleasure. But in any sort of indecision he had an odious bullying manner. It was intended to be Honest John, being modelled on a senior naval officer to whose entourage he had once been attached. But he wasn't wholly unobservant, and he had sometimes suspected that J. Barrington Smythe not quite sure of himself could be a particularly clumsy Smythe. The reflection distressed him; made him more clumsy than ever. 'We were talking about placing a million and a half.'

'That was your own guess. I told you I'd rather do some sums on it.'

'A dead accurate figure doesn't matter at the moment,

so we'll call it a million and a half. But of course you wouldn't have to place a million and a half, or anything like it. Anstey and I are entitled to a good many shares, and you've the option to buy most of them.'

Walter considered. He thought he knew what was coming next. He had been asked whether Bonavias could handle the issue, and that he had answered. He hadn't a doubt of it. Now he was going to be asked whether he could take up his option, and of that he wasn't sure. He couldn't say to Smythe what it had been possible to say to Enzio; instead he'd have to stall, talk about consulting his other directors. He'd ask for a week—that was reasonable. He opened his mouth, but Smythe was saying again: 'You've the option to buy most of them.'

'Yes?'

Smythe said with a flat brutality: 'We don't want to sell them.'

There was a considerable silence. Walter looked at Anstey, but Anstey seemed unnaturally interested in a pigeon on the windowsill.

'There was an agreement, you know.'

'You can't enforce it.'

Anstey looked up suddenly, spreading his hands in a gesture of apology. Jim Anstey was dissociating himself.

'I haven't seen the paper for some time. I'd like to look at it again.'

'You can save yourself trouble. We've had our lawyers look at it.'

'You've been to your solicitors?'

'Yes, and to counsel too.'

Anstey made an unhappy little noise but Smythe didn't seem to hear it. Walter asked levelly: 'May I ask what they advised you?'

'The loan is repayable at three months' notice. I'm giving you three months' notice of repayment. You can have it in writing, of course.'

'Yes, we should need it in writing.' There was another pause. 'May I ask you a question?'

'I may not answer.' Smythe was on the defensive again.

'Oh quite. I'll risk it though.' Walter offered cigarettes and Anstey took one. Walter said reflectively, almost to himself: 'Two hundred thousand pounds. That's quite a piece to repay us.' He looked at Smythe dispassionately. 'So what would you use for money?'

'Two hundred thousand pounds.' Smythe was laying an ace down; Smythe knew it.

'Plus interest?' Walter wasn't concerned about the interest, but he needed to be sure.

'Plus interest.'

'I see,' Walter said. 'I see.' It was true: he saw all of it. He rose on an evident decision. 'Send me your notice, please. We'll look at it too.' He held out his hand to Anstey. 'We must have lunch together.'

'I'd like to.' Jim Anstey hesitated; finally he said softly: 'It was mostly his money, you know. The business, I mean. I'm only the technical brains.'

Smythe began to gobble, but neither man looked at him.

'I quite understand.'

'Then I'd like to have lunch.'

'Say next Wednesday?'

'It's a date.'

Walter walked with them to the door.

... So the rats had got at it. He wasn't too surprised. Bonavias today....

These things got around.

Walter sat down to consider it. The loss could be considerable—he'd have to work it out—but he had been telling Enzio Bonavia no more than the truth in saying that to take up their option Bonavias would have had to bring in another firm. Or borrow if they could. And sharing a profit meant, inevitably, cutting it. Today Bonavias simply didn't have that sort of money—beautiful, liquid, usable money. Enzio too had known that. There had been a time

when they could have taken up most of Radarmic themselves on a straightforward placing. Probably they would have. But today. . . .

Walter grunted, for the wound was raw. It wasn't only a question of the loss. Prestige was involved—face, *bella figura*. Today you had an option and you couldn't take it up. It was assumed you couldn't—known perhaps; it was assumed by your peers, the men you met and lunched with. So one of them smelt a profit, one you couldn't *pay* for, that was what it came to, and off he goes to Smythe, nibbling, tempting him, offering that little more. . . .

Walter frowned irritably. He had thought of prestige, but prestige wasn't something mystical; it was real—measurable in money and business done. Lose it and you were finished. The City, he thought grimly: under its tiresome show it was a jungle like another. The ageing tiger, toothless, was lesser beasts' game.

He'd have to tell Lord Laver, and he knew what Lord Laver would say. It would be very little. He'd pour a drink and offer it; he'd sip his own. . . . 'Hm, quite a setback. Of course that offer from Baker and Looe is open still. We might have to tell them this, and maybe they'd shade their price. Still, there's a margin. Twenty per cent above our market value. But call it even ten Pity we can't see eye to eye.'

Lord Laver wouldn't panic and he wouldn't blame; he'd slip away to his bridge at Bratt's; he'd leave you feeling foolish.

And probably you were. You were sick, you were losing business. In the jungle even the jackals snarled at you. Jackals—that was the word. None of the great ones would stoop to this, for it hadn't quite come to that. Not yet. Not Overy or Pettits, and certainly not Lohmeyers. Walter heard himself laugh. No, certainly not Lohmeyers. Lohmeyers stood for a lot still; Lohmeyers kept the rules. Besides, he was on very good terms with Carl Christian.

Walter sighed. At a pinch, he was thinking, the final crisis, he'd go to Carl Christian first. Perhaps indeed he'd

have to. If the pressures went on mounting, inexorably increasing. . . .

His secretary interrupted him. 'The nurse is here, sir.'

'What nurse?' But he remembered with another pang. 'Send her in, please.'

The nurse bustled in, brisk, corseted, smiling. She began to unpack a small attaché case, laying a hypodermic on the table. 'There you are. You'll soon learn. The great thing is not to be a hero.'

'I don't feel like a hero.'

The nurse laughed loudly. 'I meant with the needle. If you hit a sore spot, a nerve or something, simply try again.' 'Oh, I should.'

'All right, I'll give you the first one.' She did so. 'Easy, isn't it?'

'You make it look so.'

'You'll soon get very expert. Expert at all sorts of things.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well. . . .' The nurse hesitated; she had spoken on a reflex which she was now being asked to explain; she didn't like it. 'I meant. . . . Well, people with your—your complaint get to know an awful lot about it. A conversation between a diabetic and his doctor is almost a consultation between doctors.'

'Jolly,' Walter said.

The nurse laughed noisily again. Like many people who laughed often she was quite without humour. 'Oh, and I nearly forgot.' She produced a carton of tablets. 'You put these in your urine.'

'I do? What for?'

'You can tell by the colour—you can see how you're getting on. Look, here's a chart-thing. Green is O.K., then there's a sort of putty colour—not so good—then orange. Orange is bad.'

'I'll watch for the orange.'

'Oh, you needn't do that, I'm sure.' The nurse packed the case again. 'I'll leave this here. I'll come again tomorrow and you can try one yourself.'

'I'll look forward to that.'

The nurse looked puzzled but finally said: 'Till tomorrow, then.'

'Till tomorrow.'

Walter sat down again, staring at the attaché case.

He sat in the Rolls that evening, next to Mears again, silent. He would have liked to sleep but could not, for the habit of controlled napping had begun to elude him. In a mounting weight of worry it wasn't something serious, but it was something he regretted; he had relished the ability to occlude himself, to slip into short oblivion almost at will. The lights of the approaching cars annoyed him and he pulled down the visor. There was a mirror on the side now nearer him, and Walter caught in it the reflection of a black Mercedes. For a moment it meant nothing, then he began to watch it. There was a driver and two men behind. It slowed as the Rolls slowed, accelerated with it. He said to George Mears: 'There's a Merc on our tail.'

'I've seen it.'

'Wave it by.'

'It won't do no good.'

'You've seen it before then?'

Mears said tautly: 'I see it most nights.'

'Wave it by just the same.'

Mears changed into third; put out the left-hand indicator; moved to the inside lane. He waved the Mercedes on.

The Mercedes slowed; put out its left-hand indicator; moved to the inside lane.

'Odd,' Walter said. 'So what happens now?'

'They sits on our tail till the Lion, and then they waits outside. You saw them.'

'The Press doesn't go for Mercs, and in any case I'm not a film star. What do they think they're playing at?'

'I . . . I haven't an idea.'

Walter Hillyard was silent, thinking, and Mears was considering too. He was more than a little worried, and not

by the Mercedes. He'd reported the Mercedes to Major Mortimer, and Mortimer had said: 'All right.' George Mears had faith in Mortimer: all right meant all right. Moreover George Mears was observant, and what he had observed was reassuring. He had observed that behind the Mercedes, not close but close enough, there was always a family saloon. Never a police car. It wasn't always the same saloon, and it was always a different driver. Just a medium-sized family saloon. Except for one thing. Mears hid a smile. It could live with the Merc and did. A few days ago they had decided against calling at the Lion and, on the empty Egham by-pass, the Merc had passed them hissing. Five seconds later the family saloon had joined it. Mears hadn't been surprised but he'd been curious. . . . Did Mortimer have several, a string of these strange vehicles, or did they change the body? Mears hadn't pursued the question. That was Mortimer's business, not his.

What was his business, what was now worrying him, was that tonight he couldn't see a family saloon at all. He looked in his mirror again. . . . The Mercedes still, a coach, two lorries, a file of oddments. Then a long, long gap back to the last traffic light.

Mears wasn't happy.

Walter broke the silence, saying again: 'It's odd. We'll stop at the Lion, and if they stop too I think I'll speak to them.'

'I don't feel like the Lion tonight.'

'Why ever not?'

'I . . . I . . . There's something on the telly.'

Walter didn't answer. He knew that Mears had television, for he had noticed the aerial on the lodge. But he didn't believe him a tellysot. Besides, Mears liked his beer; Mears, for some reason, was fibbing. Also he seemed to be driving rather fast.

Walter looked at him sideways. His jaw was set, and he looked tense, withdrawn again. There was something with George Mears. It was sad to see a friend like this—clearly in trouble. One of you was plenty. But a simple decision

tonight and both of you would be on holiday. A simple, sensible decision, all the reasoning for it, all the increasing pressures. There was nothing against it but pride, pride and a certain prejudice. A sensible decision and you'd be happily away. And so would George Mears.

Somewhere different, of course. He wouldn't thank you for a trip to Capri.

Walter slipped gratefully into a bath rather hotter than he normally took them. He lay quietly, soaking the heat up, almost asleep at last. It was pleasant to stretch; it was pleasant to be home again, a dog in a familiar basket. That was less than complimentary to Cynthia, but it perfectly expressed his mood. He lay for a long time, slowly relaxing. His decision was almost taken.

After dinner, over the coffee, he said: 'I had my first injection today.'

'Who did it?'

'The nurse Macrae sent. It doesn't look difficult. I think I'll learn easily.'

'I'd do it, you know.'

'I know you would.' He rose, pouring coffee again. 'I'd other ideas for your time, though.' He put his cup down carefully. 'We were talking about Capri.'

'Have you decided then?' She asked it very quietly.

'But for one thing.'

'What thing?'

'I dare say you'll tell me it's silly; I dare say it is. It's a personality, really.'

'You mean the firm, the boys . . . ?'

'No, I've got over that one.' He smiled a half apology. 'I'm afraid I talked a good deal of nonsense about the firm. You've made me see that—you and Macrae. And something that happened today. And as for the boys, you were right there too. We don't even know that either of them wants to go into Bonavias. They're neither of them stupid, and in any case we shouldn't be selling their patrimony if

we sold the actual business.' He hesitated. 'Cynthia, I'm afraid I've been a bore. A fool.'

'Not a boring sort of fool. I tried to tell you once.'

'Yes, I remember. Thank you.'

There was a comfortable silence which Cynthia broke.
'So what's left to hold you?'

'I told you—a personality.'

'Whose personality?'

'Sabin Scott's,' he said slowly.

She didn't seem astonished. 'We talked about him—yes.'

'*You* talked about him. You helped there too. I'd like you to talk again.'

She considered before she asked: 'It sticks in your gullet to go down to Sabin Scott? Or rather to seem to?'

'That puts it a bit simply. . . .'

She smiled. 'But is it true?'

'Yes,' he said finally.

'I'd understand if you were rivals—any sort of equals—but you're not. You're six Sabin Scotts and something to spare. He thinks you're a banker's banker, a hard-faced insider. I told you before—he'd love to pull you down.'

Walter said grimly: 'He looks like doing it.'

'Walter, that's nonsense. What he'll pull down will be an image, something he's made himself. You're really Walter Hillyard, and he can't touch that.'

He bowed, but not in irony.

'Besides, what is he?' Cynthia was speaking quickly now, talking with conviction. 'I'll tell you in case you don't know. He's the eternal adolescent.'

'A pretty bitter one.'

'Adolescents often are. There are dozens of Sabin Scotts, and all of them are successful. They *have* to be. But after success they go one of two ways. Most of them conform—assimilate. They marry some Miss Somebody, join Bratt's, put down their sons for Eton. They're in and glad to be. But one in a hundred can never forget that once he wasn't; he can never forgive it. He carries his chip till he dies. And that one's dangerous. He'll destroy and destroy and

destroy. Scott can destroy Bonavias—in one sense, that is, and if you call it that—but he can't reach Walter Hillyard. Not in a hundred years.'

'Almost thou persuadest me....'

'I know what I'm talking about. I know Sabin Scott.'

He said surprised: 'I thought you said you'd never met him.'

'I did, and it was true. But I've met him twice since then. Once was at Molly Lampeter's. He introduced himself. He asked me to have dinner with him next evening.' Cynthia Hillyard smiled unexpectedly. 'I went.'

'I don't think you wasted your time.' Walter was a little dry.

'I didn't. Meeting him gave me the arguments—everything I've just told you.' She rose from her chair, pulling a footstool beside his own, sitting on it quietly. Her head was at his elbow, the scent of her hair came up to him. 'Arguments, arguments, arguments. Now I'll give you a real one.'

'Yes?'

'I'm not quite unattractive, am I? Not quite a hag yet?'

'I asked you to Capri.'

'And so did Sabin. To Paris, rather.'

Walter mopped up his coffee with his handkerchief. Cynthia didn't move. At last he asked: 'And what did you say?'

'I told him where he could put it—not the nut.'

Walter began to laugh and Cynthia with him. She hadn't heard him laugh like that for weeks, not since Bonavias. . . . That didn't matter now.

He said, laughing still: 'Just a cosy week-end in Paris?'

'A cosy *long* week-end. He was emphatic about the long bit.'

'Mr. Scott works fast.'

'That's his reputation.'

'Still, were you surprised?'

'Not very. Perhaps I'm vain.'

'I don't think you're vain. And were you . . . were you interested?'

She said almost demurely: 'I might have been. The man *has* something, a sort of brutality, a *thing*. It didn't arise, though. I told him I'd another engagement.'

'And had you?' he asked.

She looked surprised. 'Of course. I told him I was going to Capri. I told him who with.'

'You told him I'd asked you to Capri?'

'Yes.'

'You told him you'd accepted?'

'I told him I'd jumped at it.'

'Cynthia, you're a very nice woman.' He found her hand. 'And how did he take that?'

'He took it very badly. If I'd gone with him he'd have seen that you found out. Not the certainty, perhaps, but certainly the suspicion. He couldn't have resisted that. It was one of my attractions for him—the opportunity to wound you. Yes, he took it very badly.'

'I'm delighted.'

'You needn't care how he took it. You win, you know. You can forget about Sabin Scott.'

Walter said slowly: 'I almost think I have. Cynthia. . . .' His voice tailed away.

She had to prompt him. 'Yes?'

'Thank you, Cynthia.' He looked at her hand in his. 'Intelligent, slightly scaring, charming, desirable Cynthia.' He turned to her suddenly. 'When can you start?'

It was midnight before Cynthia was sure that Walter was asleep. Then, without turning the light on, she slipped downstairs in a dressing-gown. She made sure that the extension on the telephone in the hall was disconnected, then she rang her father. It took her some time to reach him, for Lord and Lady Laver were in bed. Cynthia's mother was a rattle, and waking unexpectedly more garrulous than ever. Cynthia bore with her politely, hiding impatience. Finally Lord Laver got a hand on the telephone.

'Father?'

'Your wide-awake father.'

'I'm sorry about disturbing you. Father, it's going to be all right.'

Lord Laver said resignedly: 'What's going to be all right?'

'Is mother listening?'

'I should say she was trying not to.'

'Then Walter's going to be all right. The business, that offer. . . .'

Lord Laver didn't answer for some time, and Cynthia asked sharply: 'Father? Are you there still?'

'I'm here all right. I'm thinking.' Lord Laver continued to do so; at last he said. 'Clever girl.'

'Oh, I don't know. Things helped me.'

'Knowing my Cynthia, I doubt it. Congratulations, anyway.'

'It's not quite certain, though. . . . Father, he must never know.'

'Know what?' Laver was being patient.

'The details, the *arrangements*. About the other directors. . . . No job for Walter.'

The telephone said dryly: 'I dare say I follow you.'

'But that would finish it. That'd be an insult, a—a personality. Walter would change his mind at once. He'd never accept that.'

'I mightn't accept it myself. It's a bit of a slap for any man. Still, there it is—one of the terms. I don't think they'd change it.'

'I know they wouldn't change it. It was put there to hurt Walter. Walter's worth a seat on the board of the Bakerloo, and the others would have taken him just as they're taking you. After the merger, I mean. But Sabin Scott hates Walter, he's malicious. . . .'

'You're guessing it was done by Scott.'

'I'm guessing right. I *know*.'

'I'm not contradicting you. In any case I take your point. I'll do my best, but he's bound to know sometime.'

'If he finds out in a month, after it's all gone through, I think—I think I can make him forget it. But if he finds out

now he'll change his mind again. Then I'll be back—*we'll* be back—where we started.'

'It won't be so easy. So far he hasn't been interested in the details; he's simply said no and stuck to it. But if he's come round he'll want to see the papers—everything.'

'Hide them. Say there aren't any.'

'Cynthia, be sensible.'

'I can't be sensible; I'm serious.'

'That I can hear.' Lord Laver considered again. 'You mentioned a month,' he began.

'I don't want a month. I need thirty-six hours.'

'Why thirty-six hours?'

'In thirty-six hours we'll be in Capri.'

'Capri? You're taking Walter to Capri?'

'Walter's taking *me*.'

'I see.' Lord Laver sounded reflective. 'Damned good idea,' he said at length. He added something in Italian.

Cynthia said happily: 'Dirty old man.'

'Dirty old fiddlesticks. I gather you're going by air. Damned good idea. As for the rest, I'll do what I can. Get moving, though. Good luck.'

I6

SABIN SCOTT had received a communication from Steiffer, and he was reading it for the fifth or sixth time. Communication wouldn't have struck him as a long word for letter, since this message had never been posted. It had been handed to him in the street by a stranger with the faintest of foreign accents. . . . Well, not quite a stranger. They had never been introduced, but Sabin Scott knew what the stranger did. He sold evening newspapers from a pitch outside Bonavias.

The letter had at first been irritating, then, slowly, something else. Such statements as it made were simple. Scott would recollect a conversation at Dover, a conversation in writing; he would remember that Steiffer had assumed direct responsibility for a certain aspect of their mutual business. But that didn't mean that Scott was discharged; he wasn't entitled to do nothing. The offer to Bonavias was deadlocked, but there were more ways of breaking a deadlock than those which Steiffer had taken for his own. What, if he might ask it, was Sabin Scott doing? Nothing wasn't good enough. Baker and Looe weren't financed—kept if it came to that—simply to do nothing.

Scott read the first two paragraphs calmly. They were a statement of the position as it certainly existed, and privately he would have admitted that they weren't unreasonable. But the third was something more. At first it had merely annoyed him: he wasn't to be threatened—not Sabin Scott. Steiffer, he had decided, owned delusions of omnipotence; Steiffer was perhaps a little dotty.

Unfortunately he was Steiffer still.

Sabin Scott, very reluctantly, began to reconsider his decision to humiliate Walter Hillyard. It hadn't been wise

and he had known it: his own colleagues had raised their eyebrows. It hadn't been wise but it had been wholly deliberate. He'd show Walter Hillyard, by God he would! He'd show them all. Lord Laver was another, but Lord Laver could wait till later. Besides, they'd have to take on somebody from Bonavias, since his own board wouldn't have supported him in total exclusion. They'd made enough fuss about Hillyard. . . . He wouldn't cost more than fares from the country and some stupid honorarium; he could always be outvoted. So why take a risk? Why risk antagonizing a man who held thirty per cent?

Sabin Scott had insisted, though he was as conscious of the risk as were the others. But now it began to look different, a different sort of risk. He turned to Steiffer's letter in his hands. The risk, now, wasn't only to the acceptance of the merger; it was a risk to Scott personally. That is, if he took Steiffer seriously.

He told himself he didn't, but he read the letter again. Steiffer might be dotty or Steiffer might be bullying again. In either case Steiffer was Steiffer. It really wasn't wise, it wasn't sensible, Scott told himself, to offer him a handle. He'd never quite believed in Steiffer's—well, in Steiffer's other plans. They had struck him as melodramatic, more than a little childish. This was England, and Hillyard was visibly alive still. Nevertheless Steiffer had other and unquestionable weapons, and they could be weapons against himself. It was one thing to talk about breaking a deadlock by some crazy plan for violence. . . . Agents. . . . Pooh! But to write about Baker and Looe, the solid support they leaned on, their viscera really. . . .

Sabin Scott sighed. He had put himself out on a limb, and now he didn't fancy it. Not with the saw held by Steiffer.

But nor could he quite bring himself to change his mind entirely. In the end he took paper and pencil and began to write. He wrote several versions before he was satisfied, for he was writing the kind of letter he wasn't accustomed to. Normally he wrote six lines and signed them. That wouldn't do here; he'd wrap it up a bit. He'd have to.

. . . Baker and Looe hadn't yet had an answer from Bonavias nor even a suggestion for active discussions, so they were wondering if there was some difficulty which they could clear in advance of the discussions which they still looked forward to. Baker and Looe had in mind particularly the question of the new board of directors if the amalgamation were found acceptable in principle. On that they had made their position clear, and they were sorry they could not resile from it. It had always been the view of Baker and Looe (Sabin Scott wrote 'policy' but changed it to 'view') that small boards were much more effective than big ones, and whilst there was no question of depriving themselves of the experience of Bonavias, they still felt that the new board could carry only one member of the board of Bonavias. That being so Bonavias would realize that there wasn't any question of selection. It was proper and natural that the seat should be taken by Bonavias' Chairman.

('Besides, the old fool has a title. That's still worth a little.')

But though Baker and Looe regretted the limit, had they made themselves as clear as they might have in the matter of the directors who stood to be displaced? Baker and Looe had imagined that questions such as compensation for loss of office would fall into place once discussions in detail had started, but now they were asking themselves if the absence of anything definite in the terms of the actual offer had caused some misunderstanding. If that was indeed the case Baker and Looe would like to make clear that the question of compensation was still very much open to negotiation.

('The golden handshake isn't what it was, of course. Still, they didn't quite dare kill it. All those Tory back-benchers. Blockheads with votes in a Division. . . .')

Sabin Scott took his pencil again.

. . . Nor need 'negotiation' be interpreted too severely. Baker and Looe would wish to start from a minimum figure. In the case of Sir Thomas Gutteridge they would be largely in the hands of Bonavias themselves, but in the case of Mr.

Hillyard, a reasonable minimum would seem to be. . . .

Sabin Scott wrote forty thousand pounds. He walked round his room, muttering, struggling with Sabin Scott. Finally he returned to his desk. He crossed out forty thousand and wrote ten. Even that hurt him, but at least he could point to it. He could point it out to Steiffer.

Sabin Scott read the final draft. It rather pleased him. The style was upper-City, almost Whitehall. It was the way the big boys wrote. Or did they? he wondered. Not that it mattered. It was the way the Bank wrote.

He copied the final draft in his own handwriting. That had become fashionable too. Then he sealed it, addressing it to Walter Hillyard, Esquire. He sent it to Bonavias by hand.

Ten minutes later Walter opened it. He read it twice before he took it to Lord Laver. Laver read it in turn, then dropped it on his desk. He stared at it unspeaking.

Walter asked him evenly: 'Did you know about this?'

Lord Laver nodded.

'You knew I was specifically excluded?'

'Yes.'

'You kept it from me?'

'If you put it that way.'

'I must.' Walter lit a cigarette, pleased that he could do it casually; his voice was mild still, and that pleased him too. 'That was quite a responsibility, even for a Chairman. That was quite a responsibility, even for a father-in-law.'

Lord Laver picked the letter up, dropping it in the waste-basket; he wiped his hands with a linen handkerchief; he was silent, suddenly seventy; at last he said: 'Walter, you're sick.'

'So my doctor tells me.'

'Walter, be sensible, Walter. . . .' Lord Laver looked up miserably.

Walter Hillyard had left him.

He was driving home with Mears. They drove in a total silence which Mears knew no reason to break. Mears saw at

once that something had happened, something serious, but whatever it was it had happened in the office. He couldn't ask questions. Nevertheless he'd report that there seemed to have been some crisis. He was obliged to now—it was part of the job. He had seen Major Mortimer twice since their first meeting, and on each occasion Mortimer had given him information which he hadn't quite credited. Or not at once. Later he had begun to, later as he had nightly watched a black Mercedes. . . .

He looked in his driving mirror, pleased that for once the Mercedes wasn't behind them. Its crew would be creatures of habit, even with that evening paper-man spying for them. Midday was a very unusual time to be going home. He'd report that to Mortimer too, for it had been impressed on him that nothing was quite irrelevant. He stole a glance at his master beside him. His face was grey, a face in stone. It told George Mears again that nothing was quite irrelevant. Something had happened at the office, something had broken.

Whatever it was George Mears resented it. Things had been going nicely. He was to bring up the car at seven o'clock next morning: the Hillyards were going on holiday—both of them. They were flying to Naples from London Airport, then moving on to Capri. Both of them. George Mears hid a grin. If that was a giving-in then Mears was for surrender. He'd read books about Capri, a rum sort of place but at least not stuffy, and the mistress. . . .

It was Mears' opinion that his mistress wouldn't be bored on Capri.

He had reported to Mortimer dutifully. Yes, the morning 'plane to Naples. The public ship to Capri? He didn't know. Hotel? He supposed so, or at any rate at first, but he'd overheard some talk about a villa.

Mortimer had thanked him, then gone at once to Russell. Russell had looked glum; Russell had done some urgent telephoning.

Now something had happened and Mears couldn't guess it. He looked sideways at Hillyard again. Walter Hillyard

hadn't moved; he was staring at the road unseeingly. Mears didn't like it. If everything went sour on them, unexpectedly, just at the end. . . .

As they stopped at the house he asked: 'Like you said, sir? At seven tomorrow?'

'I'll ring you later.'

Mears liked that even less.

Walter opened on Cynthia waiting in the hall for him. 'I've got it,' she said quickly.

He didn't follow her and said so.

'Your injection, of course. The doctor made a bit of a fuss. He wanted me to bring you down to him, but I showed him my nursing certificate. It was lucky Macrae had telephoned.' She led the way into the study. There was a hypodermic on a plastic cloth, a swab, disinfectant. It was orderly, business-like, competent. It was Cynthia, he thought.

'How did you know I'd forgotten it?' Walter was feeling a little awkward. He had something to say to Cynthia, something she wouldn't like; he was embarrassed to be beholden.

'Father telephoned from the office.'

He said with a hint of resentment: 'You seem to telephone a lot.'

'I dare say I do. In fact it was father rang me, but I'm not going to hide that I discuss your illness. Why shouldn't I?'

'Have you been ringing Macrae?'

'Since the first time—the one I told you about? No.'

He believed her.

She gave him the injection neatly. 'But I rang father late last night. I asked him to conceal something.'

'As it happened he didn't need to.'

'I know. He's just been telling me.' She rolled down his shirtsleeve, handing him his coat. Both of them sat down. Cynthia said unhappily: 'We'd better have this out.'

'You know what's happened?'

'I always knew. I told you I tried to hide it. I'm not ashamed.'

'I haven't said you should be. But you knew that if I once found out. . . .'

'I knew how you'd take it. You'd see it as an insult, a personal defeat.'

'And isn't it? It's a term of the merger to exclude me, something quite definite. They'll talk about compensation as some sort of afterthought, but they won't take me in. They won't even discuss it. Not that a seat on the new board means much in itself. It isn't impossible that I'd never have been fit for it. I've faced that now—I've been made to. Twenty-four hours without insulin and. . . .' Walter looked at his shoes. 'But to be excluded. . . . They'll have the managers, they'll have your father. But they won't have me.' He looked up suddenly. 'And who do you think fixed that?'

'I won't pretend to you.'

'Thank you at least for that. And how would *you* take this?'

'I'd hate it,' she said. 'I'd be wounded and angry. I'd want to fight.'

'I'm going to.'

But she went on evenly. 'Then I'd ask myself what I was fighting. Sabin Scott?' She grimaced. 'Must we tangle with Sabin Scott?'

'He hasn't left much choice.'

'Walter, I might have gone all womanly. I could have said you were behaving childishly, pretended I didn't understand it. Except that it wouldn't have been true. I do understand. But I'm in this too, you know, and I—I want to go to Capri.'

'We'll go,' he said. 'Later.'

'I want to go tomorrow.'

He leant on the mantel, looking down at her. 'I'd hate a row.'

'There isn't going to be one. I can't force you to go to Capri, I won't even try to persuade you, though I'd set my heart on it. I won't quarrel and I can't cry. I hate scenes worse than you do. But there's something else I can do.'

'You'll leave me?' he asked. He didn't quite believe it.

He saw her smile. 'I'm not the leaving kind. I can't carry you to Capri but I can stop you killing yourself.' For a moment she dropped her eyes. 'That's a duty,' she said. 'Dreadful word, isn't it?'

'No.' He walked to the window, asking out of it: 'So what are you going to do?'

'Walter, turn round. I'm going to stab you. Not your back, please.'

He faced her again. 'Well?'

She said almost inaudibly: 'I've ten per cent of Bonavias.'

She didn't utter as he began to pace the room. He looked at her once, but his face told her nothing. He said at last, wholly dispassionate: 'I'd like to be certain of this . . . You'll vote your ten per cent in favour of the merger? You'll vote it against me?'

'I told you why,' she said. 'You'll hate me but live. I'm not a romantic. I'd rather have you hating, living. . . .'

'Have you spoken to your father yet?'

'I'd never do that without warning you.'

'I beg your pardon.' He meant it. He went to the window again. 'Cynthia, is this an ultimatum?'

'Another dreadful word.'

'Unhappily appropriate.' He faced her again, contriving a smile. 'There's something that goes with an ultimatum.'

'Yes?'

'Time. Ultimatums expire after a given time. I'm entitled to that.'

She said miserably: 'I hadn't thought. . . . Oh God.' She fought herself; recovered. 'How much do you want? A week? I can't stand much of this.'

Walter thought it over. He had just two cards. Neither was a good one but both would play quickly. 'I shan't need all that. Will you give me two days?'

'Of course.'

He held out his hand but she didn't take it. Instead she said: 'Walter, if I do this. . . . Since I'm obliged to . . . Capri. . . .'

'Would you expect to go there?'

She didn't answer but walked to the door. He opened it, and half way through she turned. 'I'd set my heart on Capri. I . . . I *wanted* it.' Her mouth twisted suddenly. 'Duty—duty! I'd handle this much better if I hadn't found out I love you.'

Robert Mortimer was with Charles Russell late that evening, talking quickly. 'So there it is—they're not going to Capri after all. Mears telephoned an hour ago. He doesn't know the reason, he hasn't been told a thing. All he knows is that Hillyard rang down to his lodge this afternoon. The trip to Naples was off. Mears was to bring the car round at the ordinary time instead of early. Hillyard would be going to London as usual.'

'But that isn't unwelcome. This trip to Capri was inconveniently sudden. Such arrangements on Capri as we've had time to make weren't very good ones. No doubt we could have reinforced them, but meanwhile it's four hours flying to Naples, a public crossing by sea, then a hotel. . . .' Russell frowned. 'I'd have felt a lot safer if Jenkins hadn't been immobilized in Switzerland. A man of your own is worth twice what the locals can do for you, even with good relations with them. As are ours with the gentlemen in Naples. They have to be.'

'I suppose it's a relief in a way, but. . . .'

'But what?'

'Well, it's all pretty odd, don't you think? Remarkably unexplained. Here's Hillyard unexpectedly deciding to go with his wife on holiday. He'd hardly have done that whilst the offer from Baker and Looe was open still and his own board at loggerheads. At least I shouldn't have thought so, but then I'm not an expert on what goes on in boardrooms.'

Russell thought it over. 'I should say you were right.'

'Then it's a reasonable deduction from Hillyard going on holiday either that Bonavias has given a final raspberry to the Bakerloo, or else that he himself has agreed to withdraw his opposition to the merger.'

'If it had been a final no I think Lord Laver would have told me.'

'Which would leave it that Hillyard had agreed after all.'

'On your original assumption—yes. That again would have suited us. Hillyard wouldn't have been in further danger from Steiffer, and the business of detaching Radarmic from Bonavias isn't one we've been asked to play with.'

'Quite so, sir. But now he isn't going to Capri after all.'

'From which you deduce?' Russell asked.

'Deduction's too big a word for it. But a possible explanation for the change of plan—I can't put it higher—is that Hillyard *had* agreed to the amalgamation and later changed his mind.'

'Hm. . . . Bit dialectical, isn't it? Anyway, where would it leave us?'

'Just where we were. Where in fact we are. With Hillyard at risk still and ourselves in the dark.'

'I hate the dark.'

'It frightens me too.'

Charles Russell rubbed his chin. 'I fancy this less and less—our sheer damned ignorance. Waiting for Steiffer to move. And as head of the Executive, the man they'd tie the can to, I've another worry which you don't share. For suppose—I only say suppose—but suppose your protection broke down. We shouldn't have warned Hillyard; we'd be terribly vulnerable. Officially, I mean.'

'I still can't see the advantage of telling him.'

'I know you can't. I know the arguments against telling him, and they're still quite sound ones. The logic still convinces me, but I don't sleep well on logic. I mentioned it once before, but in our profession logic has a habit of disintegrating.'

'I must leave it to you, sir.'

'On balance I think I'll have to warn him. After all, we're officials, though pretty queer ones; we're entitled to think officially—sometimes. Which means thinking first of your own skin. The trouble is I'd like to tell him quickly, and it just isn't the sort of thing to rush at. I can't pick up a telephone.'

It's a pretty odd story anyway, and coming across a telephone, out of the blue. . . .' Russell shook his head. 'Hillyard mightn't believe a word of it—I mightn't myself. No, I'll have to write a letter; I'll have to do it formally to make it stick at all—two envelopes, the largest seal. Delivery by hand—the works. I can't be alarmist, but nor can I say too little. We'll need to talk to him. I'll catch him with a letter tomorrow morning at his office. Then he'll have to answer.' Russell frowned again. 'Tomorrow's Friday. We'll hardly see him before Monday.'

Mortimer said thoughtfully: 'That leaves a whole weekend.'

'I know it does.' Russell rose suddenly. 'A very long weekend. For all of us.'

Later that evening, before he went to bed, Walter called the maid. He told her, keeping his voice casual: 'There's a bed in my dressing-room. See that it's aired, please.'

'Signore.' The maid looked unhappy. She was an Italian, which meant that she thought of her employers as something more than a weekly pay packet. 'Signore. . . .'

Walter Hillyard caught the note of distress; he looked up smiling. 'I'm not very well. No, it's nothing—a day or two.'

The maid at once relaxed. A day or two—a man could live for a day or two. A cold, perhaps? It was considerate not to give the honourable signora a cold. A little hot milk then? Or a whisky and lemon? That seemed to suit English colds, though in her own countryside there was a remedy, much prized. . . .

'No thank you,' Walter said.

'But something, surely. . . .'

'I don't think it would help.'

I 7

SABIN SCOTT and Walter Hillyard had remarkably little in common, but a dislike for the Swiss and Switzerland was an exception. Steiffer had summoned Scott again, this time to his villa at Lugano, and Sabin Scott was going there with an apprehension not by any means explained by his distaste for what he thought a very dull resort. He had several times met Steiffer in his office in his own country, but he had never been asked to his home, and, since the business of Bonavias, he hadn't met him openly anywhere. Indeed, he reflected, smiling sardonically, Steiffer had been at considerable pains not to be seen with him at all. But now he had been summoned to the presence's summer villa. That wouldn't have been done for nothing and Sabin Scott well knew it. He would have admitted that he wasn't at ease.

He had taken an aircraft to Milan and had hired a car there. That was quicker than going either to Zürich or to Basle, and the fiat for his attendance had been as peremptory as ever. He drove into Lugano still disliking it, but Steiffer's villa impressed him. It wasn't particularly big but it was solidity, prosperity personified. The house was in the local stone, ugly and, despite three stories, it somehow looked squat, but it was evident that money hadn't counted in the building of it. A garden, meticulously barbered, ran down to the lakeside; at the end of a little pier a brass-bright launch danced in the midday swell. There were a dozen houses like it, and Sabin Scott was conscious of a familiar emotion. These people not only had things, they'd held them for generations. They were 'they', inescapably 'they', whereas himself, Sabin Scott—successful, pretty rich, half a million or nearly. . . .

Sabin Scott was 'us' still.

A German-speaking butler admitted him, and presently Steiffer came in. He greeted Scott with a controlled formality. Sabin Scott was alarmed. Steiffer in anger was normally a bully, but this icy rage, physically suppressed as well as mentally, was much more frightening than anything he had experienced. 'Please sit down,' Steiffer said. Scott did so, but Steiffer stayed standing. Scott hesitated, then, though he didn't want to, began to rise again. 'Please sit down,' Steiffer repeated.

Sabin Scott sat down.

Steiffer said coolly: 'Our affair is not progressing.'

'I know—I got your message. But what can we do?' Scott realized that he had sounded apologetic and he hadn't meant to; he collected himself. 'The offer to Bonavias is open still. They haven't said yes but they haven't said no. If you've any suggestions. . . .'

'Not suggestions.' Steiffer sat down deliberately, staring at Sabin Scott. The room was cool and dark, but Steiffer produced dark glasses; he put them on with a gesture almost judicial. The cap, Scott thought—black cap, dark glasses. . . .

He reined himself furiously.

But Steiffer was speaking again. 'I told you before that time could be important. Now it is pressing. You don't think I'm interested in Bonavias, do you? A second-class family concern? I could buy one tomorrow without difficulty; I could take my choice of several. Radarmic is what I need.'

'I'd realized that.'

Steiffer ignored him. 'Radarmic,' he said, 'has been in touch with Lohmeyers.'

'I didn't know that.'

'You surprise me—unpleasantly. I don't expect your information to be always as good as mine. You don't spend a fraction of what I spend on informing myself. But the reputation of the City of London is that it isn't easy to keep a secret there.' Steiffer shook his heavy head. 'I'm disappointed and displeased.'

Scott heard himself say: 'I'm sorry.'

'We'll leave that, then. But I'm telling you what I think you should have known; I'm telling you that Lohmeyers have been in touch with Radarmic directly.' Steiffer put square hands on his knees, leaning forward. 'And what do you make of that?'

Scott said reluctantly: 'If Lohmeyers took on Radarmic, lent them the money to pay off Bonavias. . . .' He shrugged. 'We'd have had it,' he said.

'Not a phrase I approve. My English may not be colloquial but at least it is correct. And I wholly disagree. Let me put it in the simplest terms. If we could control Bonavias before Bonavias have actually accepted repayment from Radarmic, then I wouldn't fear even Lohmeyers. Legal processes in England are notoriously costive. Your legal system gives advantages to the long purse which would be tolerated in no civilized country. I happen to have a long purse.' Steiffer shook his head. 'You seem less intelligent than I had believed. You disappoint me again.'

'You mean we could stall? Prevent repayment? The *status quo*. . . ?'

Steiffer said with a frightening patience: 'We could stall for at least a year. And in a year a great deal can happen.'

'I see.'

'I'm glad. Then you'll see why I called you here; you'll see the importance of time.'

'But it's deadlock. Walter Hillyard is blocking it.'

'I know he is.' Steiffer rose, walking to a desk. At it, his back to Scott, he said: 'I gave you a figure for the offer but the details I left to you. It seems I was mistaken.'

'If you think. . . ?'

'I do not think, I know. I told you I had excellent information.' Steiffer sank into silence. Scott could see that he had taken off his glasses, but he did not turn. At last he asked: 'It was a term of the amalgamation that Hillyard should be excluded?'

'With compensation, of course. I've written about that. I've offered it expressly.'

'When?'

'Yesterday. I thought—'

'But it was a term that he be excluded still?'

Scott nodded.

'Why?'

'He's tired and old-fashioned. He's out of date. He isn't worth a seat.'

'Is Lord Laver so much better?'

Sabin Scott didn't answer.

'I wish you to take this seriously. I spoke to you once of personalities—of personal pride and family connection. Yet you excluded Walter Hillyard. That was an insult, a calculated, inescapable insult. It put *me* at risk, and quite without reason. It risked the whole project unnecessarily.' Steiffer swung his chair round suddenly. His eyes were naked, and this time they glittered with something more than malice. 'Why did you do that?'

'I tried to explain.'

'And I do not believe you. I spoke to you of pride but you spoke to me of hate. I do not judge these things, but nor do I forget them. You may have your hates as I have mine. In more than one sense they bind us. But I am Steiffer and you are not, and what you risked was Steiffer.'

'I think you exaggerate.'

'I state cold fact. My intelligence is excellent, but it does not include reading the mind of Walter Hillyard. So I do not tell you that he would have accepted if this insult hadn't been offered him; I tell you that the insult was *unnecessary*. You gambled *my* plans, *my* wishes. Now you must retrieve yourself.' Steiffer stood up. 'I want Bonavias, and I want it in forty-eight hours.'

'You must know it's impossible. How on earth. . . .?'

'But I'm not concerned with the means. Not now. I had means of my own, as I told you, but I've never underestimated your security services—I have reason not to—and I wasn't too much surprised that my own means failed. And that sort of operation has normally a single chance. Given warning, foreknowledge, subsequent attempts are handicapped. That, my dear friend, won't make your task the

easier. You could say that the professionals have failed. Now it's for an amateur.' Steiffer smiled coldly. 'The amateur is you.'

'It's out of the question. It's insane.'

'Insane? I've been called that before. I don't take it as an insult, or not from you. Of course if you can see alternatives. . . .'

'If you've any suggestions,' Scott said. He was trying to speak lightly.

'I told you—I don't make suggestions. Ever.' Steiffer began to speak slowly, almost as though to a child. 'It's really extremely simple. I want Bonavias in forty-eight hours, and the methods, now, are not for me. Otherwise. . . .'

'Otherwise?' Scott repeated. He hadn't wanted to.

'Once we spoke of scores—long, long scores. If I lose Bonavias, lose Radarmic through your bungling, I should certainly have another.' Steiffer walked to the door and opened it. 'I pay my scores, you know. I *have* the means to. Sometimes it takes time, but in the end I pay them.'

The butler showed Scott out, and outside the gate he stopped the car. He sat in it thinking . . . Steiffer was crazy, a megalomaniac. As though he were a killer—he, Sabin Scott! And threatening him! The thing was absurd in any case. Why, professionals had failed.

Sabin Scott swore softly. He knew they didn't always.

He told the driver to go back to Milan. He'd catch the evening 'plane to Paris. Paris if you knew it, spoke adequate French, was still a pleasant city for an unattached gentleman with money. An unattached gentleman threatened by a lunatic.

It was unfortunate he was a very powerful one.

Sabin Scott shrugged, telling himself that he wasn't worried. Steiffer was bluffing: it was the stupid bluster of a too-rich man.

Scott looked at his watch, asking the driver to hurry. He didn't want to miss his aircraft. He was looking forward to Paris; he *needed* Paris.

For any sort of pressure Sabin Scott cherished a well-tried remedy.

It was something after midnight, but Mortimer was with Russell again. He wouldn't have disturbed him except in emergency, and he was making it as brief as possible. 'Sabin Scott has been to Switzerland and Steiffer's at Lugano. Scott went to see him there. Now he's in Paris.'

Russell, roused from beauty sleep, was equally laconic. 'When did you know this?'

'Not till just now—not all of it. I needn't say that Scott's being watched still; he took the early flight to Milan this morning. We knew that, of course, but there's nothing sinister in going to Milan. Hillyard isn't in Italy, and Scott could have a dozen quite innocent reasons for the trip. But when he arrived he hired a car, and he told it to take him to Lugano. Our friends in Italy told us that, for naturally I'd warned them.'

'And our friends in Switzerland?'

'We haven't any, or not in this context. The Swiss are very correct where Steiffer is concerned, but he's been in Lugano for several days.' Major Mortimer looked innocent. 'It isn't difficult to watch a house. You don't need a Jenkins to get a list of visitors.'

'I wasn't asking about the details.' Russell in turn was bland. 'But Scott called on Steiffer?'

'Yes.'

'And then?'

'Then he drove back to Milan. He went to Malpensa and took the evening 'plane to Paris. I don't know what he's doing there but in an hour I shall.'

'I see.' Russell sank into reflection, and Mortimer finally broke it.

'You're sending that letter to Hillyard, sir?'

'I certainly am. Tomorrow morning—no, this morning. I don't know where this is taking us, but clearly it's somewhere hazardous. Every time Scott has met Steiffer there

have been developments. Our present assumption is that any danger to Hillyard comes from Steiffer directly. Directly.' Russell knocked his pipe out. 'It's an assumption,' he repeated.

Mortimer said thoughtfully: 'It'd be a much bigger one that Sabin Scott himself would dare to try violence.'

'Ignorance, assumptions, guesses. The only safe hypothesis is always the worst. I've learnt that here if nothing else.'

'What do you think I should do, sir?'

'There's nothing much you can, or not for the moment. Sabin Scott's in Paris and Hillyard's in England. That would seem safe enough if we're thinking of Scott himself. But when he returns. . . .'

'When he returns, sir?'

'Watch him, I beg you. Watch and pray.'

Sabin Scott woke next morning in his expensive hotel as the waiter brought his coffee. He lay for a moment stretching, at ease again. Steiffer, he knew now, was bluffing; Steiffer was out of his system. He had known it as he had stirred at seven, half-waking as she had left him. She had been dark and lithe and obliging, but he hadn't detained her.

He pulled himself up on an elbow, reaching to pour the coffee, smiling as he noticed the note pinned to his pillow. It would be thanks again, he decided, for he had been generous; it would be thanks and a suggestion for a further meeting. He didn't propose a further meeting, since he didn't now require it. He poured his coffee and opened the note idly. It was in careful, impersonal capitals:

YOU HAVE THIRTY-SIX HOURS LEFT

It was a quarter of an hour before he went into the bathroom. He shaved with a cut-throat and he picked it up. He opened it; looked at his hand. He put it down again. Then he sent for the barber to shave him.

18

WALTER HILLYARD had told himself that he had just two cards. Neither was a good one but both would play quickly, especially the first. The first was Carl Christian of Lohmeyers. Walter had always liked him. His name hadn't always been Christian, and his religion was no man's business. Not that in Lohmeyers it was exceptional.

And Christian sat waiting for Walter at eleven o'clock that Friday, more than a little uneasy. He could think of only one reason why Walter Hillyard should have asked to see him, and that was a disturbing reason: Hillyard must have heard about Radarmic and Lohmeyers; that fat fool Smythe must have leaked. Carl Christian shuddered delicately. He was a man of sensibilities, and Barrington Smythe had offended them. Christian had indeed disliked the whole affair. His opinion of Walter Hillyard—his professional opinion—was his own, but as a man he admired him. Christian loathed what he was doing, and only categorical instructions from his partners in formal session had persuaded him. He had been told that the matter was political, something of national importance, but he had the scepticism of his race for matters of national importance. The Prime Minister himself, they had insisted. . . .

Carl Christian had only a moderate opinion of the Prime Minister. He sat waiting unhappily, for he didn't know what he would say to Walter Hillyard. Toughness would be treated with contempt and excuses with something worse. Besides, he wasn't a toughie but a considerate, civilized man.

Carl Christian was miserable.

He rose as Walter came in, shaking hands quietly, offering a chair without fuss. He inspected Walter without appearing

to; he thought he looked ill and he wasn't surprised. Carl Christian began to hate himself.

Walter said carefully: 'You could help me. Lohmeyers could help me.'

Christian was silent: it wasn't the opening he'd expected.

'It's about Baker and Looe. You'll have heard, of course. They want to amalgamate with us.'

'Yes, I'd heard that.'

'And I don't want to amalgamate, or not with them.'

Carl Christian smiled. 'That I can understand.'

'Thank you. That makes it a little easier, though not much. You see, I'm speaking personally. Baker and Looe have made us a very good offer, but I've held out against it for some time. I oughtn't to conceal that I have personal reasons to do so. That puts me in a spot.'

'I can see.'

Walter accepted a cigarette. 'In point of fact I should have said that it *had* put me in a spot, not that it puts me now. For I don't have control of Bonavias—not of the equity. I could be outvoted and I think I'm going to be.'

Carl Christian's lean face was impassive. He was relieved that the interview wasn't following the lines he had expected, but he wasn't quite at ease yet. Walter Hillyard was in trouble, and that troubled Christian in turn. He felt for Walter Hillyard something he wouldn't have wished to analyse. It was his opinion that the Walter Hillyards—all of them—had had their day, but that didn't mean that one should kick them down the slide. Carl Christian, alien in thought and culture, saw in Walter Hillyard virtues and values. The virtues weren't his own but the values he respected. He sat on silently for he had nothing to say.

Walter too was silent, considering Lohmeyers. Lohmeyers were old, one of the oldest, but nobody suggested that they were anything but quite first class still. They could, when the fancy took them, eat most of the rest for breakfast: just occasionally they did so; they had an almost curial power to renew themselves. Look at Carl Christian himself: he wasn't a Lohmeyer, he hadn't even married one,

but he was very much Lohmeyers. He wasn't a Lohmeyer but he was Lohmeyers *pur sang*. He'd despise a Sabin Scott. And Walter himself was English, conscious of failings, but every instinct protesting against defeat by Sabin Scott. He was English, conscious of failings, yet he went straight to Carl Christian for help. It was probably illogical but it didn't seem unnatural.

Christian spoke at last. 'You were talking about being outvoted.'

'Yes. And to that extent the personal problem is less. I won't bother you with the history, but there was a time when I could have blocked this merger. Frankly, for a while I did just that, but I was never quite happy about it. There were the other shareholders, whereas my private feelings about Baker and Looe....'

'Are perfectly intelligible.'

'Still, there it was. I had my private feelings about seeing Bonavias swallowed by Baker and Looe to balance against the interests of the other shareholders in a better than average offer. And it's a family business, you know.'

'I know.' Carl Christian considered. 'But if you're going to be outvoted anyway, the problem of morality—' Christian smiled suddenly—'I wouldn't call it that to everybody—the personal aspect vanishes.'

Walter said deliberately: 'I'd still like to see Bonavias saved from the Bakerloo.' He hesitated. 'Even if it went elsewhere.'

Christian sat very still; he knew what was coming but not how to deal with it. He was a generous man, but for a moment felt almost resentment. Hillyard couldn't seriously be thinking that Lohmeyers, Lohmeyers and Bonavias.... It would be an embarrassment if it were even suggested—not intentionally unscrupulous, but in practice unfair. Now if it had been some upstart, some Sabin Scott, it wouldn't have been difficult to say no. Most emphatically no. Nem, nem, soha! But to Walter Hillyard....

But he was speaking again. 'If I could show the board, the other shareholders, another offer....'

Carl Christian was in pain. He had once been a scientist, and he wouldn't have argued whether the pain was mental or physical since the distinction wasn't a scientist's. But he acknowledged the brute fact of its existence. He sat looking levelly at Hillyard, his face expressionless but his sympathies wholly engaged. All were with Walter. The Walter Hillyards were finished and Christian regretted it. Without them the City would move faster; make itself higher profits, bigger and better mergers. Not justice constrained its appetites—social justice, whatever the cliché might mean—and certainly not the law; only a certain tradition, and Walter Hillyard stood for it. The jungle, Christian thought—the naked, anarchic jungle. Soon they might be back there. Better the known arena. At least the arena had decencies, and men like Hillyard held them.

Carl Christian let his breath out.

'I beg your pardon?'

Christian smiled an apology. 'You were saying that Baker and Looe had made you an offer?' Carl Christian was thinking quickly. He was determined on just one thing: he wouldn't unless forced to say no to Walter Hillyard. He'd ride him off; he'd somehow spare him the last humiliation.

'Yes, and a good one. But it's Baker and Looe, not—not Lohmeyers.'

'I know.' Carl Christian looked at his beautifully kept hands. 'I don't want to sound impertinent, but if you feel able to tell me how much . . . ?'

Walter Hillyard told him.

'Indeed? You surprise me.' Christian was genuinely surprised. 'I don't know Bonavias' affairs, of course, but I'd have said it was a very good offer.'

'It comes from the Bakerloo.'

'It still sounds a damned good price.'

'If one of the other banks. . . .' Walter's voice perished flatly, quite without hope. Christian, he knew, had understood him; Christian was turning him down. Delicately and he was grateful. But turning him down.

'None of the others could beat that figure.' Christian stood up. 'None of them,' he repeated. 'At least, that's my own advice.' He laughed easily, with conviction, for he was an excellent actor. 'I'm assuming that advice is what you came for. I'm flattered.'

He walked with Walter to the door, then returned to his desk. At it he began to swear. He swore in four languages, quietly but with intensity. . . . Walter Hillyard had come to Lohmeyers; he'd come to them for help. Christian looked at his watch. In forty-five minutes he was seeing J. Barrington Smythe again, Smythe and some damned minister. There was irony in that, and normally he owned a taste for irony. But not this morning.

Carl Christian began to swear again.

Walter Hillyard went back to Bonavias to find the nurse waiting for him. He hadn't much taken to her, but now he welcomed her presence. At least, for ten minutes, he needn't think—couldn't, he reminded himself, as the nurse chattered on. She gave him the injection, then asked brightly: 'Have you done one yourself yet?'

'Not yet.'

'You'll have to learn, you know.'

'When I'm at home my wife does it for me.'

'Wives have their uses, haven't they?' The nurse was a trifle coy.

'Oh yes. Oh yes, indeed.'

'And have you tried the tablets?'

'What tablets?' Walter had forgotten.

'You're a very bad patient. The tablets for your urine. You can tell by the colour—remember? Green is O.K. and orange dangerous.'

'Yes, I remember now. I'll try one this evening.'

The nurse shook the carton. 'You should, you know. It's silly to be—well, silly.' She looked at him intently. 'Tomorrow's Saturday.'

'I've got insulin at home, all right. You needn't worry.'

She said, for the first time a woman: 'We do, you know.'

He saw her out and sat down. . . . Well, there was one card left. Enzio had forty, forty per cent. You wouldn't need all of it, but only ten. Ten against Sabin Scott. Enzio was eighty, Enzio might not listen; he'd bitterly resent the least attempt to embroil him. Nevertheless there was a flight in the afternoon. Enzio was an outside chance, a chance against Sabin Scott.

Walter's hand was on the telephone when his secretary interrupted him. She gave him an official envelope—*On Her Majesty's Service*. It was heavily sealed with a signet he didn't recognize. There seemed to be another envelope inside.

'Where did this come from?'

'I'm afraid I don't know, sir.'

'You didn't ask?' Walter was astonished, for his secretary was competent.

'I asked all right, but the messenger wouldn't tell me. He said he wasn't allowed to. He just made me sign for it.'

'Did he say it was important?'

'They always say that.'

Walter dismissed her, fingering the envelope. He was irritated. This was official—obviously, consciously official; this was from Bob Parratt. Bob Parratt on some half-baked assignment again, half-understanding its importance because only half-knowing it, only half-knowing it because only half-trusted. Bob Parratt talking round things again. No, he couldn't take Bob Parratt. Not at this moment.

He put the envelope, unopened, in his pocket.

He picked up the telephone again, dialling GER 9833, and two miles away there was a click as a relay dropped in, a whirr as the tape recorder started.

Russell was saying sharply: 'Going to Naples, you say? To *Naples*? After all?'

'That's where he's booked, sir. There's some sort of flight in mid-afternoon. A summer extra, they tell me.'

'Never mind the summer extra. Is he going alone?'

'He's only booked one seat.'

'He'll have had my letter too.' Russell was puzzled. 'No further information?' he asked. 'Reason for change of plan again? Motive?'

'Nothing, I'm afraid, sir.'

'I wish. . . .' But Russell checked himself. 'Is Jenkins still in Switzerland?'

'Yes, sir.'

'There's no chance of getting him out, I suppose?'

'None that I know of. In any case there's hardly time.'

'What have we got in Naples of our own?'

'Nothing of any class. Nothing I put higher than the locals.'

'Then it'll have to be the locals, at any rate *pro tem.* Not that I like it.' Russell was within distance of irritation. 'We've friends in Naples, pretty good friends, but I've put them on notice once. And then I took them off again. Now they'll think I'm a mad Englishman. There's a convention that Latins love mystery but in fact they detest it. They mistrust it; they'll mistrust *me.*'

'There's certainly not much to go on.'

'There's nothing to go on at all. I asked our friends to keep an eye on Hillyard.' Russell's voice changed to mimicry: '"Certainly, my dear Russell. Ben volentieri. An eye against what? He's in personal danger—ah! Danger from whom? Steiffer, did you say? But interesting—we've all heard of Steiffer. But Steiffer's not in Italy, Le assicuro. Some agent of his—some agent or agents unknown? This is Naples." ' Russell's voice became his own again. 'Then yesterday I ring them up and tell them it's all off: Hillyard isn't coming after all. Now I ring for the third time and tell them he is.' Russell waved an exasperated hand. 'I hope I'm not pompous, but I don't fancy looking incompetent. Moreover and more serious, people who look incompetent don't get much service. What would you make of this business yourself if you were sitting in Naples?'

Mortimer said cautiously: 'I honestly don't know.'

'You're much too tactful. You'd think I was a fool. You'd cut your cloth accordingly.'

'It's possible.'

'I'll telephone just the same, though. I'll have to.'

Mortimer rose, but Russell stopped him. 'And Sabin Scott?' he asked.

'Scott's still in Paris. He's catching a 'plane after lunch.'

'To London?'

'To London.'

'Well,' Russell said, 'that's something. That's something, I suppose.'

He picked up the green telephone.

Walter Hillyard had made his arrangements. George Mears was to call for him at half-past two, and a night bag he had brought with him already. He was looking at it now, thinking that he couldn't have had much hope of Lohmeyers. Otherwise why bring a night bag, the clothes to go to Enzio?

He clucked impatiently. That sort of thinking was futile: it was better to keep busy. He began to check his bag methodically. . . . Pyjamas, a lightweight suit, two changes of linen, his shaving gear. Oh, and he'd almost forgotten it. . . .

He added a leather case, checking that in turn. There was a hypodermic and insulin, the tablets the nurse had been insistent about.

Walter smiled grimly. He'd almost forgotten it and clearly he couldn't afford to. This case was his life, or what was left of it. Forget it and. . . .

That mightn't be wholly disaster.

Sabin Scott had spent a miserable morning. Another man might have got drunk, but Sabin Scott drank seldom; he liked to keep his mind clear, and now it was clear indeed. Uncomfortably clear.

Steiffer had been serious; Steiffer meant business.

Scott had lunch in his room, forcing himself to eat. He paid his bill at the desk and sent for a taxi, inspecting the driver suspiciously. His expression was surly, but Parisian taxi-drivers weren't notable for bonhomie. Sabin Scott shrugged and climbed in. He looked through the window behind. There was nothing obviously following him, but then he hadn't been expecting to be obviously followed. Besides, he had thirty-six hours still, thirty-six hours for the impossible. Steiffer was mad, but that was hardly helpful. Thirty-six planless hours. . . .

He looked at his watch. Now it was nearer thirty.

He went quickly through the Customs at Heath Row, out into the hall. At the door of the channel next to him a party was collecting. They had cameras and maps and guides, for they were tourists.

One of them wasn't.

Sabin Scott almost stopped but checked himself. He walked to the control desk quickly.

'Channel Nine. Where's that flight going, please?'

The girl looked up. The voice had been crisp, the voice of authority, but it hadn't been unprepossessing. Nor was the man before her.

'To Naples, sir.'

. . . Naples! Naples wasn't England. No indeed.

'Could you possibly get me on it?'

The girl glanced at the clock. 'Well. . . .'

'Is there a seat?'

'I don't think it's full. But. . . .'

'I'd be more than obliged. I know it's pretty late, but I've everything in order. I can pay you in cash. I've friends in your organization.' Sabin Scott named one.

The clerk began to telephone, and Scott looked at Channel Nine again. The party hadn't moved yet. Walter Hillyard was standing, talking to what seemed to be his chauffeur.

Presently the girl put the receiver down. 'We can sell you a seat but we can't hold the aircraft. There's no guarantee—I'm to emphasize that.' She smiled at him. 'This happens

sometimes and we don't much like it. There are all sorts of rules. But since you're a friend. . . .' She looked down suddenly. 'Where's your bag?'

'Downstairs, I suppose. I've just come from Paris. I'll get it.'

'You'll have to have it weighed again. I'll ring down and explain.'

Sabin Scott ran down the elevator.

. . . They could be helpful when they wanted to.

He returned within a minute, waving at the receptionist. 'When I get back. . . .' The party at Channel Nine had begun to move, and Scott joined its tail. Walter Hillyard was before him, but the chauffeur was waiting still.

Sabin Scott walked through last, and the door shut behind him. Another man joined the chauffeur. They spoke for a moment briefly, then ran to the telephone.

George Mears, Robert Mortimer considered, was being unreasonable. Over his third pint he was saying for the third time: 'You can't stop me going.'

'I know we can't. But you've still to tell me what you think you're going to do there.'

'Ah . . . I'll admit I'm not young any more. I'm not an expert.'

'Then why go pushing your big head in?'

'Because he's been good to me. Because I . . . I like him.'

Mortimer said patiently: 'But I told you—we've warned the Italian police, and the Italian police aren't slouches. If you've been fed with that one you can forget it. And in twenty-four hours I'll have a man of my own available. A suitable one, for any old agent won't do. A first-class man. And on his way by air.'

'Plenty can happen in twenty-four hours.'

'You think you could stop it?'

'Perhaps—perhaps not. I've got to be there, though.'

Major Mortimer sighed softly. 'We can't possibly approve it. We can't possibly finance you.'

'I don't need money. You gave me a—what did you call it?—a float when you asked me to help you. I've still got most of that, and I've some savings too. I can pay the fare and live for a bit. I've a passport as well. There's an airyplane at midnight.'

'And can you speak Italian?'

'Never a word.'

'I think you're crazy—rather splendidly crazy.' Major Mortimer finished his beer. 'Riflemen Mears, you're a stubborn fool.' He held out his hand. 'God go with you.'

I9

WALTER HILLYARD could tell himself that his interview with Enzio Bonavia hadn't too much surprised him, but he wouldn't have pretended that he wasn't disappointed. Some spark of hope had burned still, lingering against what he knew to be the probabilities. He had arrived in Naples without notice and would have thought it inconsiderate to go at once to Enzio; instead he had taken a room in an hotel which was neither an international transit camp nor too powerfully local in its colour. Next morning he had paid his call.

Now he was leaving the house, being shown out by the major-domo, courteous and a little remote. Enzio himself had been remoter. He had listened in silence, his eyes unmoving; he had listened politely, but Walter had sensed at once that he had failed to touch him. Enzio understood but Enzio didn't care. It was a proposition, he had said finally, and perhaps not a foolish one. He had forty per cent of Bonavias still and, though he hadn't voted it for fifteen years and more, there was certainly no legal reason why he shouldn't do so now. Walter's proposal was that he should. Yes? But the reasons would need careful consideration, and Walter must excuse him if, at eighty, he shirked hard thinking. Enzio Bonavia had shrugged. Perhaps he wasn't capable of sheer hard thinking. He was thinking but did not say that Walter had no reasons. Motives—yes: Enzio could guess them where they hadn't been made explicit, but motives weren't good business. The offer from Baker and Looe was a good one—he'd said so already—and it hadn't become less so. Rather to the contrary, he had privately decided. . . . These extraordinary English, proud, scrupulous—they were children really. He suppressed another

shrug which with anyone but an Englishman he would happily have allowed himself. He said again that he was much too old to think, but it was his firm opinion that there was nothing worth the thinking. Walter hadn't a care.

Walter Hillyard walked across the courtyard into the roaring lane. He was exhausted, conscious of failure, but he hadn't begun to feel. He didn't wish to feel. Emotion could be nothing but unpleasant; emotion could wait and must.

Unconsciously he was walking faster.

In his room at the hotel he looked at his watch. It was time for the day's injection. He unpacked the leather case, fitting the hypodermic together, filling it. He took off his coat and rolled back a shirtsleeve; he dabbed his arm with disinfectant, pinching the flesh as the nurse had shown him. He picked up the hypodermic.

Unexpectedly, astonished and ashamed, he was sitting on the bed. He couldn't do it—not to himself. He shook his head disgustedly. Of course he'd heard stories, tales from the war, but he'd never quite believed them. . . . Men stood in a queue at some doctor's table waiting for TAB, battle-hard combat troops with, like himself, their arms bare; and coldly brave men with medals—he had two of his own—keeled over in sweaty faints at sight of a long thin needle. He'd heard the story a dozen times; he'd thought it a sort of folk-lore. It seemed that it wasn't.

Shaking his head again he picked up the telephone, ringing the porter. . . . He wanted a doctor. No, he wasn't ill, but he needed an injection and he wasn't accustomed to doing it himself. It was perfectly simple and he had everything necessary. If there wasn't a doctor a nurse would do. The porter was reassuring—a doctor would call at once—but Walter knew Naples. At once? Well, say in a quarter of an hour. That, it was implied, was surely at once. A mere fifteen minutes. . . .

Walter said that he would wait just thirty. To fill them he opened the packet of tablets. He wasn't particularly interested. He had thought of the tablets as a sort of game and rather a messy one. Nevertheless he found a chamber-

pot—cleaner than some, he noted—and this he used. He dropped in a tablet, but it didn't melt at once. He turned to the colour chart. . . . Now what had they said? Green was all right, and putty-coloured doubtful. Then orange was serious, orange was for danger. . . .

He looked at the pot again. His water was an unambiguous, a terrifying orange.

He sat down on the bed again, fighting himself. When he looked at his watch he saw than an hour had passed. The doctor wasn't coming. He put out his hand to the bedside telephone, then deliberately dropped it.

The doctor wasn't coming nor the nurse. Perhaps it didn't matter. Walter's shrug was much slighter than Enzio's, much more English, but it wasn't less eloquent. He rolled down his shirtsleeve, fastening the cuff-link; then he put on his coat. He locked the door of the bedroom carefully behind him. He did so unthinking still, by instinct. For this was Naples.

Sabin Scott had been last on to the aircraft and almost the first off. He didn't think Walter had noticed him, and by now he was telling himself that it wouldn't much have mattered if he had. For reaction had arrived inevitably. He had caught the flight to Naples on an impulse—come to think of it, on nothing more solid than the cliché that Naples wasn't London. And no doubt that was true. . . . So what? Things happened in Naples that didn't in London, or if they did were much more difficult to cover. So what again? Things happened, but not by themselves: somebody had to start them in Naples as well as London, and in Naples he was helpless. He hadn't the connections, he didn't know a soul. He didn't even speak Italian. Naples wasn't an answer to Steiffer. Sabin Scott stiffened unconsciously. Steiffer, he knew now, was serious. He might be crazy but it was certain he wasn't bluffing. . . . So you jumped on an aircraft to Naples, following Hillyard, but by the time you arrived you had begun to think again. You might just as well not have started.

In the cold wind of reality Sabin Scott shivered. Depression gripped him flatly. He hadn't a plan, and only the faintest possibility of making one. He told himself dourly that he would be a fool to bet a pound on it. Nevertheless. . . .

He went to an expensive hotel, tipping the head porter extravagantly. His stay would be indefinite, he said, and he didn't speak Italian. The porter could help him in more ways than one, and this was something on account.

The porter accepted twenty thousand lire gracefully but with a reserve which he communicated beautifully. He wasn't committing himself, for he had formed his own impression of Sabin Scott. Without appearing to he assessed him carefully. He thought he knew the type. Of course if it were women it would be easy, twenty thousand and more to come for doing almost nothing. But the porter didn't think it would be women, and that would be more difficult. Not with the police—he had excellent friends amongst the police—but with the hotel. There had been a scene the year before, an extraordinary old couple, the parents it appeared, stumping in from England; asking questions; talking about the Consul and behaving barbarously. It had been very bad publicity, and the management hadn't liked it; they'd been very firm with the porter indeed.

So he accepted his twenty thousand politely but without excessive gratitude. Sabin Scott said again that when he left. . . .

The porter said he hoped that wouldn't be too soon. There was so much to see in Naples and around it—antiquities, fine views, Ischia and Capri. The signore was interested in architecture? He could arrange a car to Caserta. Any small service. . . .

He did not take Scott to his room himself but sent an underling. He hadn't mentioned it, but he had time to consider Sabin Scott and how to manage him. He went off duty in half an hour; he wouldn't be back till noon next day.

When Sabin Scott again approached him. The second porter had been very much younger—not, Scott decided, a reasonable risk—and the delay had frayed his nerves. But the head porter, he said now, could do something for him.

The porter bowed. Any small service. . . .

'I wouldn't call this small. It's important to me and therefore worth money.' Sabin Scott waited, but the porter was silent. 'In a sense we should be partners.'

Under his breath the porter said: 'Finocchio.' He knew just where he was and just how to handle it. In his excellent English he added aloud: 'Gentlemen have their tastes, and this is a civilized city. It does not judge but there are people who presume to. Foreigners. But this is an hotel. Outside it would be different. Outside I have friends.' His gesture defined them precisely.

Sabin Scott stared at him. He was furious but didn't dare show it. At last he said: 'You've got it wrong.'

The porter hid astonishment and something more. He was a very good judge of men; he was angry to have been wrong, but he in turn hid anger. But his manner changed sharply. 'Dica,' he said.

'This is a civilized city. You said so.'

'Of course it is.'

'But it has a—a reputation.'

'One quite undeserved.' The porter was annoyed again. He wasn't acting but genuinely indignant. He was a Neapolitan, and perfectly conscious that his city had a certain reputation, a certain reputation amongst foolish, self-righteous foreigners. Foreigners wrote books on Naples, foreigners made films about it. Damn their smug impertinence. There was poverty in the queen of cities, bitter, degrading poverty, and crime—crime to spare.

As though there wasn't crime in London, and poverty too if you knew where to find it. The porter knew, for he had learnt his English there. He said softly: 'One should see this Naples, not read about it.'

'I've come to see.'

The porter waited.

'I'm interested in—well, in crime.'

'You're a journalist? A writer? There was a very bad book about Naples.'

'No.'

'You're a policeman?'

'Certainly not.'

'A detective, then?'

'Do I look like a private detective?'

'Frankly, you do not. But you said you were interested in crime. If you're not a reporter, nor a writer, nor a policeman. . . .' The porter's eyebrows rose.

Sabin Scott said deliberately: 'There's one thing more I might be. I might be a criminal. Or looking for one.'

The porter relaxed at once: his feet were on the ground again. This well-dressed too-rich foreigner wanted a job done. A serious job, naturally. So he comes to Naples to fix it. He'd been reading a great deal of nonsense. The fool, the insulting fool! The Neapolitan was outraged, but he did not display it; instead he became again the head porter of a fashionable hotel. 'Signore, if you *are* a criminal, I must beg you not to involve this hotel. On what you tell me we might even have to ask you to leave.'

'I'm not a criminal myself.' Sabin Scott spoke unsmiling. Steiffer, he remembered. . . .

'Then perhaps you have criminal contacts?'

'I haven't. That's just my difficulty.'

The porter smiled politely, wholly at ease once more. All foreigners were fools, and fools could be milked by better men. But sometimes a fool was dangerous. As this one was. And better men ducked danger. The porter said smoothly: 'I understand you, sir.'

'You do?'

'But perfectly.'

'You'll help me then? I'll make it worth your while.'

'I will not help you, sir.' For a moment the porter was silent. His English was very good, but this was an occasion for something more than excellence. He reviewed his considerable vocabulary. Finally, head down, he said: 'I fear you mistake yourself. There is crime in this city—yes. A great deal of crime. More than enough, if you follow me. We're a family, but proud. We take in each other's washing but not—not strangers'. We're poor and we lie and steal.

We kill, for sometimes we have to. I'd steal your shirt to feed a cousin's grandchild. In a way I'd be proud to. That's pride again, you see.' He looked up suddenly. 'I'd even kill you, but only if I had to. That's the point, I'm afraid, for I don't think you'll take it. I'd kill you but not for hire. I won't even help you to kill. Not for money.'

'A great deal of money?'

The porter said wearily: 'Please leave me, sir.' He was tired, taut with effort. He thought himself insulted and he was a Neapolitan. He had also a job to keep, a family. Damn all foreigners, damn their insensitive ignorance. Blast their stupidity, their blundering arrogance. God rot their costive guts.

The porter moved quickly, holding the door for Sabin Scott. 'I should go for a walk, sir. The harbour is beautiful.' He opened the door and Sabin Scott went out; he bowed politely but with irony. Sabin Scott didn't notice it. It had been done very delicately and Scott wasn't delicate. 'Buon divertimento, signore.'

'I don't speak Italian.'

The porter went back to his desk. He lit a cigarette, inhaling deeply. Since smoking on duty was forbidden he hid it in his other hand. He looked at his pointed shoes. He would have given a million lire—well, he thought, smiling at last, twenty thousand lire—for just one kick at Sabin Scott.

Where it would hurt him most.

Walter Hillyard sat on a bench looking across the Beverello. . . . So this was final, final twice over. Bonavias was lost. Carl Christian wouldn't save it—that was business and predictable—and Enzio wouldn't even try to. Bonavias was finished—dead. And thinking of the dead, Walter Hillyard was almost amongst them.

He smiled without humour. Neither Macrae nor the specialist had been specific, but Walter had made inquiries of his own; he knew that diabetes was something which could linger for years or something which could worsen very quickly. As, inescapably, it had.

. . . An unambiguous, a terrifying orange. Two shots a day, he thought, and later three, a ball and chain on what was left of him. You were walking or perhaps just reading and, and, suddenly the urgent need, the ugly leather case, a string on existence but hardly on life. Later a nursing home, waiting, pretending, a burden to dependants. Walter heard their voices, saw their smiles. They'd have special voices and special smiles. They'd be brave and optimistic, but they wouldn't meet his eyes. A burden to his children, Cynthia. . .

He muttered in pain. Cynthia too was lost, for he'd thrown her away. He couldn't make claims on her.

He raised his head, staring at the dancing water. Capri lay just across it. This time he groaned. He might have been there with Cynthia—a month, a week or two, something to hold, to take with you, and something saved.

He'd wasted even that.

At the pier a ferryboat rose and fell lazily, its gangway crowded with an increasing bustle. Walter knew its destination. He rose stiffly, walking to the sportello. Capri—he might as well see it again. Alone. There would be doctors on Capri if he wanted one. Not that it much mattered.

He bought a single ticket, and Sabin Scott saw him. At first he had not. He had walked to the harbour but he hadn't noticed it, far less a man on a bench, slumped, head in hands. For he had other things to notice. Insistent instinct told him that he was spied on—shadowed. A man on a bench had risen suddenly and Sabin Scott had known him. He stood watching him buy a ticket, the watcher watched. He knew it and he was frightened. Not for the first time he turned his head sharply.

There was nothing and no one, or rather there were a hundred men, and any man jack of them. . . .

Sabin Scott waited till Walter was on board. Then he too bought a ticket. He bought a return, but he couldn't have said why. He had twelve hours left or less, and hope had run out of him.

In the Security Executive Charles Russell was saying bleakly: 'I've had Nardi on the line again. Nardi's an old friend of mine, but he's too good a policeman to make promises. The orthodox he can cope with, but the wildly uncanonical, Sabin Scott for instance. . . .' Russell shrugged.

'And I've done what you told me. There'll be a man on the 'plane tonight. He's not as good as Jenkins but he's pretty good. The best available.'

Russell drummed on his desk, staring at Robert Mortimer. 'And this chauffeur you tell me about?'

'We'd be foolish to rely on Mears.'

'We should.' With a hint of irritation Russell added: 'You should never have let him go.'

'Then tell me how I could have stopped him.'

'I beg your pardon.' Russell smiled. 'Tension, you know.' He considered for some time. 'This aeroplane your man's on—when does it get to Naples?'

'Round about dawn, sir.'

'So we're open till dawn?'

'Wide open.'

On the molo a shabby man appeared from nowhere. He hadn't shaved and he had slept in his clothes. The booking clerk didn't like the look of him. He was clearly not Italian, and if this was what tourists were coming to. . . .

The shabby man jerked his thumb at the steamer. 'Where's that one going, please?'

'To Capri direct. There's a notice.'

'I saw it. I wanted to be sure.'

The clerk said with clumsy sarcasm: 'Permit me to assure the signore.'

Mears cut him short. 'How much?'

'Single or return?'

'Single will do for now. Will you take English money?'

'I'll have to change it myself. What have you got?'

'Pound notes.' Mears produced one.

'I'll give you fifteen hundred.'

'I'll take it.'

Mears passed the note over and the clerk short-changed him. Mears took his ticket and looked round. Walter and Sabin Scott were safely on board.

He turned up his collar and pulled down his cap; he went up the gangway as the deckhands began to move it. One of them swore at him, but Mears didn't answer. The last thing he wanted was attention.

Walter found a seat in the saloon, for it wasn't yet high season. He told the waiter to bring him brandy. He was feeling a little fey, but not so light-headed as to stifle a lifetime's habits, and it had been a very long time since he had started a journey on impulse. With the now unaccustomed brandy he began to think executively. He'd find an hotel—that wouldn't be difficult—but he was quite without necessities. He'd have to buy pyjamas, a toothbrush and razor. In Capri they'd overcharge him, but he had plenty of currency. Enough for a night in a comfortable bed, enough for his oddments; enough, he thought grimly, for the doctor he'd be needing. If he sent for him, that is.

He clucked impatiently. Of course he'd send for him. Melodrama in public made a great deal of extra work for people who'd done nothing to deserve it: policemen, for instance; the servant who would find you dead; an underpaid consul-general. Melodrama in public was inconsiderate—very bad manners. And melodrama in private was simply contemptible. You looked at a new idea, death as it happened, not facing it fairly but playing a stupid game with it, pitying yourself. . . .

Of course he'd call a doctor. He'd send for him when he needed him. Apparently that wasn't yet.

He ordered another brandy.

At Capri he took the funicular to the little piazza, looking about him, smiling. He'd heard that the place had changed, but he hadn't quite believed it. Capri was an establishment though decidedly an odd one, and it took more than a

sudden fashion to alter an establishment. He looked round the tiny square again. The feathered friends were there still, the starlets out of jobs or at least not acting, the strange old men pretending to be young ones. An eagle or two had flown, perhaps to Ischia: the sparrows were faithful still. And that was the noise they made, chattering, exhibitionist. See and be seen. Be heard but do not hear.

. . . Cynthia would have enjoyed it all.

Walter frowned, walking to an hotel less pretentious than many. He explained that he had arrived without luggage and, without being asked to, offered a deposit. The manageress looked at him closely, then declined. Five minutes passed in mutual compliment, its outcome known to both. Finally Walter went out again, buying what he needed.

He returned to the hotel, explaining that he wouldn't be wanting dinner. He wasn't feeling ill: on the contrary his energy was surprising him, for he was conscious of a violent restlessness. His brain seemed extraordinarily clear—up to a point. Problems swam up in it, their outlines crisp and clear, inviting decision, the firm seal of action. So you put out a mental hand at them, and. . . .

Nothing. Inexplicably it had gone.

Walter frowned again. He'd go for a walk and clear his mind; he'd walk through the town to the Villa of Tiberius. Probably he'd find a doctor's; at least he'd find the Villa. Cynthia had wanted to see it specially. He thought it over-rated, another ruin, but Cynthia had been curious. And why shouldn't she be curious? Cynthia had gusto, good fresh blood. And he'd denied them. He'd stayed on Ischia, fastidious, sniffing at Capri. Not good and fresh at all, but old, very thin.

Still, he'd walk to the Villa. He'd find a doctor on the way. A doctor, doctor, doctor. Bloody old doctor.

He saw that he was through the town, well past the lighthouse. That would be forty minutes and he hadn't noticed them: he'd almost reached the Salto. Unconsciously his pace decreased. It was over a thousand feet, quite sheer. Tiberius had pushed his pals down—so they told you.

Shocking. Walter wasn't shocked. One day he'd write a book—*Great Villains of History*. He'd give them a break at last: Nero, Genghiz Khan, the lot. They were amateurs really, incompetent dilettanti. Compared with what happened today, in Algeria for instance, which that Sunday newspaper never let you forget, or in Russia which it never mentioned, all of them were innocents.

He slowed his step again, thinking of half-crazed prisoners, screaming perhaps, falling a thousand feet against the sea. The emperor would be watching them, his court would be laughing its guts out. They'd be watching the body drop, the distant final splash, peeping over.

Walter Hillyard amongst them, but only just. He hated heights. He made himself face them, sweating and ashamed, and the Roman Walter, an emperor's sycophant, wouldn't have turned tail. He wouldn't have let himself, he didn't now. He forced himself on slowly, step by reluctant step. There was a railing he didn't trust, and not continuous. It was all very casual, casually mended. Part of it was solid, modern iron, and part was post and rail. Further up, where the guides took the tourists, they were much more careful. Here—well, you shouldn't have been here in any case. Not alone, a little drunk or feeling it, alone with the maiden moon.

Walter stopped suddenly, turning his head. There'd been shouting behind him, a warning perhaps. Some peasant it would be. How graciously he'd agree with him, how gratefully be led away. At first he saw nothing, then the moon caught them, coming straight at him. The first was crudely masked but the second was Mears. Walter could hear his breath.

He didn't understand it. He stood stupidly, trying to think, failing. . . . A man in a mask and Mears. George Mears on Capri. What in hell was George Mears. . . .?

He waited a little stupidly, watching the silently running men. The railing was under his hand, and for a moment it meant nothing. Then fear came up at him. There were a thousand feet, quite sheer, a frame of wood between him-

self and horror. The men were almost on him but he had quite forgotten them. Instinctively he dropped. A foot caught his ribs as the first man stumbled. The second thudded into him. There was a splintering crash. For a moment both fought for balance, groping grotesquely. A cry; and silence.

Walter stood sickly, staring at the broken wood. There'd been six feet of it perhaps, between the iron. The iron was upright still, but bent, leaning outwards. Walter looked at it foolishly. He couldn't think but he could notice detail: a single iron stanchion leaning drunkenly, the hands of a man still holding its stem. The stanchion began to move as weight went on it strongly. A man's face came up slowly, very white.

Sabin Scott said faintly: 'Help me.'

Walter Hillyard did not move.

Sabin Scott put one hand out, scrabbling the bare rock for fingerhold. He found a little ridge, began to pull on it. Almost at once it broke, but still his left hand held him. Walter stood quietly, detached. . . . He must be pretty strong. All his weight on one arm and bent at that, all of his thirteen stone. He'd go in time, of course: one needn't do a thing. All his weight on a bit of iron. Walter looked at it curiously. Its root had moved again. Not much but it had moved. At its base was a gap of open earth, an interesting gap. Walter watched it coolly.

Sabin Scott said gaspingly: 'God! Jesus God! Get hold of me.'

Walter didn't answer.

Scott's hand came out once more, feeling again blindly. Walter noticed that it was bleeding. This time it found a crack. The bloody fingers tore at it, at last worked in.

Walter came to life again. He took two paces forward, his left foot near the hand. He raised his right. He'd think it out later—which of them Scott had intended and, perhaps, why. That didn't matter now. Scott was a murderer, an old friend's killer. He'd killed George Mears. Only to bring your heel down, once—once on that hand. Of course it would bleed again and Scott would curse him. Or perhaps he'd

break down. He looked all in. The hand would go back to the post, and maybe you'd shake it gently, very gently.

Walter raised his foot again. Only to bring it down. Another man would, a man, a proper man. . . .

He shivered, watching Scott. Scott inched himself up, first chest, then finally a knee. In the moonlight his face was inhuman: enormous sobs tore him. But the knee had decided it. A final heave and he was up.

He rolled like an animal, away from danger; he started to rise but failed. On hands and knees he dropped his head. He began to vomit hideously.

Walter didn't move to him. For an instant he watched him silently, then started to walk away.

He walked in a haze which at last he recognized. Well, this would make it easier. Gin, Macrae had said, gin was a poison. Not that it could change the past.

. . . You sat at a City dinner, staring down into the dark hall. Bob Parratt was sparing them nothing, but they were lapping it up contentedly. Your own nerves shrieked but a hundred and twenty men were silent. The dais was eighteen inches higher than the body of the hall, and those eighteen inches made you uncomfortable. You were looking down and you hadn't any right to.

Indeed you had not. You couldn't bring a heel down.

. . . And what had Cynthia said? 'Walter, there's nothing to hold you. If you were what he thinks you are, true blue, four square, a City gent. . . . But you're not. In your heart you despise them all.'

'If I do it's a weakness.'

She had said very quietly: 'A weakness you feel you must fight?'

'Perhaps.'

It wasn't perhaps at all. Secretly you did despise them, or at least hold aloof. You fought because you must, meeting them reluctantly, hating the arena.

Naturally they'd beaten you.

. . . And Cynthia herself—he'd failed there too. He'd thrown her away and senselessly. They wouldn't have had long—not now—only something to hold, to take with you.

He'd chosen his pride instead, a sensitive, pale man's pride. He wasn't a coward, or not in anger, but put him against reality, hard men and new ones, put him against the daily pinches. . . .

He broke at once. He couldn't even kill an old friend's killer.

For a moment his mind cleared. There was a story about drowning men: they said life passed before them. But he wasn't a drowning man, he was a diabetic drifting into coma. He'd have to work quickly, for this was decision at last. In this at least he mustn't fail. Just for this once.

He found he was back in the town, and went into a wine-shop, buying gin. It was very bad gin, and normally Walter wouldn't have looked at it. Now he smiled dourly. He hadn't much time and the brand didn't matter. For an instant he hesitated, then bought a second bottle.

He put one in each pocket and returned to his hotel. The night clerk noticed them but did not comment. He decided, rightly as far as it went, that Walter was getting drunk. He hid a shrug. Anglo-Saxons were notoriously intemperate.

Walter said thinly: 'I'm very tired indeed. I want to sleep late tomorrow.'

The night clerk said he understood; he understood perfectly.

'Don't call me until after lunch. In no circumstances whatever.'

Walter started for the stairs but changed his mind. He took the lift instead. To pass out now, to have them call a doctor, shooting stuff into him, saving him. . . .

He wouldn't risk final failure.

In his bedroom he locked the door, throwing his clothes off. He drank as he did so. The gin caught his throat, made him splutter, but he went on drinking. Consciousness came and went again. He wouldn't need much more gin, only the

hours till lunchtime. Gin was to make sure, gin and a life-time's failure. Bonavias. Cynthia. George Mears. Back to the gin again. Gin was an insurance, and sensible men insured. Sensible City gents. He wasn't one of them.

In bed he finished the first bottle.

Suddenly he forced himself upright. This wouldn't do at all: he was causing a great deal of bother. Tomorrow he'd be a nuisance, and that would be inconsiderate, very bad manners.

Half-conscious he staggered up, emptying his note case. There were two hundred thousand lire still, and he found paper and an envelope. He scribbled a note to the manageress. The paper rushed up at him, receded mistily. Walter scrawled on. He owed an apology, he wrote, and all he could do was to offer it. The money was at the discretion of the manageress. When it had paid his bill he'd like the rest. . . .

He made a final effort. The rest could be divided between the servants he was troubling.

Somehow he got back to bed. He opened the second bottle, slopping the gin untidily. He raised the tumblerful but never drank it.

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J. BARRINGTON SMYTHE's clothes were as over-masculine as ever. They offended Carl Christian but he was showing no offence. James Anstey, as usual, was sitting quietly. Christian was fingering a cheque. He passed it across his desk to Smythe. 'This,' he said briefly, 'takes care of it.'

Barrington Smythe rose solemnly; he took the cheque and began a speech about the national interest. Radarmic, he said, had great potential. Its loss to what amounted to a foreign power would have been disastrous, and from that disaster Lohmeyers had saved the nation. He was speaking now as a citizen, not as the owner of Radarmic. . . .

Anstey said softly: 'Part-owner.'

'Part-owner, then. But citizen first.' Smythe bowed at Christian. 'Your promptness, your public spirit. . . .'

Anstey pulled him down but Smythe ploughed on from his chair. 'Your vision—'

Carl Christian cut him short. 'Lohmeyers is in business,' he said.

'Fine, far-sighted business. The best traditions. . . .'

But Christian had had enough; he rose with finality. 'Radarmic—good luck to the flotation. Every prosperity.' He looked at Smythe coolly. 'Of course, we shall want a piece of it.'

Lord Laver was on the telephone. It was Elliott, a director of Baker and Looe, and Lord Laver thought his condolences excessive. From time to time Laver said briefly: 'Tragic—yes,' or, when that seemed inadequate: 'A great blow to all of us.' He waited patiently, knowing that Baker and Looe

wouldn't have telephoned merely to commiserate. They weren't that sort of people.

Presently the Bakerloo came to the point. 'I was wondering . . . now that Hillyard's dead. . . .'

Laver said shortly. 'There's myself and my daughter and a man called Gutteridge.'

'I see.' There was a considerable pause. It was clear that the Bakerloo did see. They saw very well. 'We'd been wondering whether Hillyard's views and your own had been—well, similar.'

'Walter was always against a merger. I can tell you that now.'

'I don't deny we'd guessed at it.'

'You guessed quite rightly.'

'And now?'

'Now I'm at your service.'

Elliott began to talk too quickly. 'In that case there's the time factor. I don't conceal we'd like to settle this. Can we come to see you? May we bring a lawyer?'

'I'll get my own.'

'At three o'clock?'

Lord Laver was surprised. But if they wanted to rush their fences. . . .

'Let me look at my book.' He had nothing at three and knew it, but he rustled his engagement book. 'I'm free at three.'

'Thank you. We'll call on you. Mr. Scott is abroad, but the rest of us will be there.'

'A pleasure,' Lord Laver said. He put down the telephone. His handsome English face bore an expression it didn't often. It was easy to believe that his surname was still Bonavia.

For Lord Laver had been thinking—thinking and making some discreet inquiries. Walter had been behaving very strangely, too oddly to be explained simply by his opposition to the merger. In any case he'd seemed to have that blocked. Yet off he'd gone a second time to Enzio. And he'd been talking to Carl Christian. That hadn't been hard to discover, but why was surmise. Lord Laver had made three

guesses, all of them shrewd ones. He'd talk to Cynthia when she returned from Naples. Walter had been going to Capri, Cynthia with him, and Cynthia had been jubilant. Then suddenly he'd gone alone to Enzio.

Cynthia would have the answers, or at any rate one of them. The others lay elsewhere. Probably with Russell.

Lord Laver took a taxi to his club. He'd played ball with Charles Russell, he remembered; he'd given him information. Russell would repay it if he could.

And Russell had surprised him. He'd said nothing of Bonavias, nothing of Baker and Looe; he hadn't mentioned mergers. Instead he'd talked about a firm called Radarmic. He'd talked at large, in parables, and Laver hadn't pressed him. He knew better than to press officials, high security officials especially, but he had listened very carefully. Russell had mentioned Radarmic and more than once. It seemed that it was quite a firm: Lord Laver would have heard of it. Russell had told him nothing, but enough.

Back at Bonavias Lord Laver had looked up Radarmic. He hadn't seen the papers for some time, but now he re-read them carefully. When he had done so he reviewed his three guesses. One of them wasn't affected—he'd still have to talk to Cynthia. Of the other two he mentally scratched out one.

He considered the other. . . . So someone was interested in Radarmic, someone not Baker and Looe. It couldn't be Baker and Looe since, if they knew of it at all, they'd get it with Bonavias.

If Bonavias still had it.

Lord Laver lit a long cigar. Russell had been allusive, but perhaps he had orders, politicians' orders; perhaps he was obliged to be. But one thing he'd never concealed: he didn't want Bonavias to merge with the Bakerloo. He'd never admitted why—he mustn't, he'd said—but now he was talking of this Radarmic.

Radarmic was important.

Lord Laver saw it suddenly. Russell must know about the option, and if Radarmic was important—it must be to interest the Executive—he wouldn't want it passing to the

Bakerloo. Not if the Bakerloo was really a man called Steiffer. No indeed.

Lord Laver smoked intently. So far so good, he thought, It was inference but it fitted. And as for the rest. . . .

But he'd answered his own question! 'If Bonavias still had it'—that was the key. So long as Walter lived, blocking the merger, blocking the option with it, Charles Russell need do nothing. But once Walter died Russell would have to act.

As probably he had—he or some friend of his. Lord Laver picked up the file again. The option wasn't watertight. It was contingent upon a loan, two hundred thousand pounds. And loans could be repaid. If you had money. If someone gave it you.

Lord Laver chuckled. He'd never know whose money, but one thing was an odds-on bet: at any moment now Radarmic would be calling on him, waving a certified cheque. Two hundred thousand pounds and interest. He'd accept it, of course; he'd have to.

He mixed a whisky thoughtfully. This would need careful timing. The Bakerloo wanted Bonavias; they wanted it very badly, were in fact rushing him. Would they want it without Radarmic?

Lord Laver shook his head. Not if he'd guessed it rightly. They'd drop it in an instant. Bang would go the offer.

And that wouldn't suit him at all. He was seventy, without a son; he wanted to sell Bonavias. They'd never get that price again.

But he'd have to tell Baker and Looe—about Radarmic, everything. Of course he would.

He sat down deliberately, sipping his whisky. This was the City, the City of London. Its standards were impeccable.

It was a pity the Bakerloo so openly despised them. You shouldn't despise what was old. It was really a little risky. The old might not like it. They might decide that what you despised you weren't yourself entitled to. They might include you out. They might even ring up Radarmic, just to save time.

Lord Laver, born Bonavia, smiled a Mediterranean smile. The Bakerloo, he thought—they couldn't invoke the rules they trampled on. He'd never much liked them anyway. Sabin Scott in particular.

Sabin Scott had stayed on Capri. Walking back from Tiberius's Villa he had known he was in trouble, potential trouble with the police. He told himself sourly that compared with the threat from Steiffer the police needn't worry him, but that was no reason to behave suspiciously. Dashing back to Naples would look odd. So, for that matter, would having arrived luggage-less, but he had an explanation for that: he'd plead impulse and quite truthfully. But he'd send for his baggage at once—that would corroborate impulse. And criminals didn't settle on their crime.

Besides, he asked himself, what crime? At bottom it would be Hillyard's word against his own. Hillyard would go to the police, and the police would question both of them. Then he'd stick to total ignorance. He wouldn't deny an acquaintance with Hillyard—that would be an unnecessary lie and therefore dangerous—but he'd stand on a firm denial of everything Hillyard said. He'd hint, reluctantly, that perhaps Mr. Hillyard wasn't as well as he might be. He had looked pretty sick last night. Some sort of breakdown perhaps. . . . Sabin Scott nodded. He couldn't be sure, but he had a reasonable chance. The ground had been solid rock, there wouldn't be footprints. He was certain they'd been alone.

He looked at his hands. There'd be blood on that railing too, his or at least his group. The police would start prying, looking for motive, building their case up.

He went to bed but did not sleep, passing next morning aimlessly. He walked and he took a boat trip, choosing one going west, away from the Salto. It lasted much longer than he had expected, and he was very late for lunch. An excited waiter served him, chattering in English. There'd been a tragedy—some English milord. He was dead in his room

in another hotel. Scott wasn't interested, but the waiter ran on. It seemed that this milord was ill, dying perhaps, though it was rumour still, so he'd finished himself—Fft! The waiter cocked an eyebrow. Would the signore perhaps have known him?

'I don't know a soul on Capri.'

'This was a visitor. He came yesterday evening.'

'Yesterday evening?'

'By the last boat but one.'

Scott forced himself to speak casually. 'You don't know his name?'

The waiter grinned. 'Some English name—most difficult.' He made an attempt at 'Hillyard'. It wasn't a good one but it was good enough.

Sabin Scott said 'Thank you' in dismissal. He gave the impression that the subject bored him. By God, he thought, he wasn't bored. Walter Hillyard was dead—never mind how or why: he, Sabin Scott, was safe. He looked at his hands again. They'd take a day or two, but so might finding Mears, and even if they found him now they'd think first of a fall, an accident. An English tourist, obviously not rich—who would want to kill him? Such money as he had, his petty valuables, would still be on him. No, he'd been drinking perhaps, for the English often did. The police might even hush it up, since it wasn't good publicity. Not with one scandal already.

He went to his room. He was safe and from more than the police; he was safe at last from Steiffer. He hadn't killed Hillyard but Hillyard was dead. Bonavias was an open town, ripe for the sacking.

Steiffer would be pleased with him.

He thought it over carefully. His first intention had been to return to London, but he reconsidered it. He was conscious of a certain reputation; he wasn't exactly loved—not by the old ones like Bonavias—and Hillyard had detested him. It might be much wiser to leave it all to Elliott. Elliott was competent, an excellent negotiator. It was true that Steiffer didn't tell him things, or not the things that

mattered, but he didn't have to know of them to gobble up Bonavias, he didn't have to know what Steiffer was really after. Radarmic! Sabin Scott smiled. Elliott knew of Radarmic as one of Bonavias' assets—two hundred thousand pounds, a loan at interest. They had included it in the offer, which Elliott thought too high. Of course he did. Elliott wasn't Steiffer's right-hand man, nor any of the rest of them. Directors—yes; directors—pooh! There were Steiffer and Sabin Scott, and Steiffer would be pleased with him.

Yes, he'd stay on Capri. It was better to leave it to Elliott, and it was an open-and-shut job anyway. Besides, he'd seen a girl, one he knew slightly and had determined to know better. There was a man with her, but Scott didn't take him seriously. He wrote leftish reviews for one of the week-end papers; he hadn't a shilling.

Scott wrote a careful telegram to London before he went to bed. He slept for three hours, and in the evening walked to the piazza. The man and the girl were sitting at a table. The girl waved an invitation and her escort frowned, but Scott didn't join them at once. For something had happened. He knew it in his blood—was sure. Nobody was watching him.

He smiled contentedly. That was typical Steiffer staff-work.

He spent three days on Capri, occasionally telephoning to London. Elliott was cock-a-hoop: everything was going smoothly. They expected to sign on Wednesday, Wednesday at six o'clock. Sabin Scott could drink a toast to them. Sabin Scott did so.

He woke on Wednesday night, and not alone, reaching for the insistent telephone. The night clerk said it was a call from London—immediate, highest rate—and Scott told him to connect it. The telephone crackled angrily, then Elliott came through. He was in panic and not hiding it. 'We've had a call from you-know-who. Have you heard of Radarmic?'

'Of course I have.'

'So-and-so's beside himself.'

'Why?'

'I can't make it out. We signed tonight—paid too. I should have thought he'd be delighted. Instead he says we've let him down; we've landed him with a shell. He was abusive—threatening. I think he's a little crazy.'

'Who was he threatening?'

There was a second's pause before the telephone said: 'You.'

'Did you tell him where I was?' Not that it mattered, Scott thought. The pack had been called off but it could always be whipped back. He said again: 'Did you tell him where I was?'

'I had to. I think he knew in any case.'

'I meant my address. . . . Telephone number?'

'Yes.'

Sabin Scott considered. 'What do you make of it?'

'I told you—nothing. He kept raving about Radarmic.'

'What about Radarmic?'

'I simply didn't follow him. Bonavias had a loan with Radarmic—two hundred grand. We knew about that, of course; we allowed for it in the figures. And the day before we signed, Radarmic repaid it. I don't see it matters a damn. We've two hundred thousand cash instead of a loan at an interest we shouldn't ourselves have looked at. If anything I'd say we're up on it. But to listen to so-and-so you'd think we'd swindled him. What's it about? You're closest to him—you tell me.'

'I wish I could.'

'You'd better fly back—sort it out.'

'I'll think it over.'

'My advice is to think quick.' Elliott was talking still, but Scott broke the connection.

The girl was half asleep still, but she had caught his tone. 'Bad news?'

'For Christ's sake shut up.'

She opened her mouth in protest, then shut it suddenly. She stared at Sabin Scott. She knew trouble when she saw it.

Sabin Scott put his hands behind his head. . . . He had money abroad—everybody had money abroad, and damn

the regulations. Exchange control was an impertinence: it was intolerable that a rich man couldn't divert his capital from his own country when his country was in difficulties. Not that you couldn't beat the silly rules—damned doctrinaire longhairs—and plenty of people did. Most of your friends had nest-eggs, money in Switzerland, New York or Bonn, money to run to when the heat came on. He had fifty thousand of his own. Not in Switzerland—he'd never much fancied Switzerland—but in Brazil. Fifty thousand. It wasn't a fortune but it was enough to start again on. São Paolo, he decided: it was a fine new city, brash and competitive. Sabin Scott could do well in São Paolo.

If Steiffer would let him. If he ever got there.

The telephone rang again. He picked it up.

'Another foreign call, sir. From Switzerland. From Lugano.'

'Tell them I'm not available.'

. . . So somebody had Radarmic, somebody not Steiffer. He wouldn't be pleased at all.

Scott dressed in the early dawn and the girl dressed with him. She went out silently, hiding relief at leaving him. Her mother had been a gipsy and she could smell things. She smelt something now and she was terrified.

Scott went downstairs. The servants weren't about yet, and he pushed the front door open. Across the street two men were doing nothing in a doorway. One of them, as he saw him, walked away. The other lit a cigarette, staring at Sabin Scott.

Sabin Scott went indoors again. There was a jet out of Naples, tomorrow, for New York. . . .

It didn't seem worth the trouble. Not with Steiffer staff work. Sabin Scott smiled, for he wasn't without courage.

Wait for it, he thought. He'd have to wait for it.

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